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Arundhati quits Berlin film fest over jury chief's Gaza comment

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Centre gives Rs 1L cr to overhaul cities

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Full-strength K'taka takes on Uttarakhand in semifinal

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SALAR

DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

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Hope is a political act: Ram Puniyani

BENGALURU, 14 FEB

In an exclusive interaction with **Salar News**, veteran activist Ram Puniyani argues that defending India's democracy requires organised civic resistance, not despair. Reflecting on rising communal tensions, economic distress and voter roll controversies, he says the fight is "not just for minorities, but for the Constitution itself". From grassroots community centres to coordinated human rights action and sharper electoral strategy, Puniyani outlines a four-layer response to what he calls a dangerous political moment. Yet he remains cautiously optimistic, insisting that India's youth, focused on jobs and development, may yet tilt the balance towards pluralism.

Read the full interview on Page 5

1 dead as metro pillar falls on auto, car in Mumbai

MUMBAI, 14 FEB

One person was killed and three others injured after a slab of the girder bridge of the under-construction Metro Line 4 collapsed on vehicles in Mumbai's Mulund area on Saturday afternoon, officials said. The parapet wall slab fell near the Johnson & Johnson factory on LBS Road shortly after noon, crushing an autorickshaw and a Skoda car. The deceased IS Ramdhan Yadav. The injured, Rajkumar Indrajeet Yadav, 45; Mahendra Pratap Yadav, 52; and Deepa Ruhiya, 40; were taken to hospital. Rajkumar remains critical in ICU, while the others are stable. Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis ordered a thorough probe, including a safety audit of all such sites, and said action would be taken against those responsible pti *—PTI*

Fresh firing in Manipur's Ukhrul; police urge calm

IMPHAL, 14 FEB

Fresh firing was reported on Saturday at Litan Sareikhong in Ukhrul district, Manipur, allegedly by Tangkhul Naga village volunteers, police said. Around 12 rounds, believed to be blank shots from a 12-bore weapon, were fired near the foothills between Sikibung and Litan, sparking panic among residents. A joint team of district police, CAPF personnel and local civilians verified the site. Security has been reinforced, with BSF deployed at Mongkot Chepu and CRPF stationed in Litan as a confidence-building measure. The violence began on 7 February, following an alleged assault, later escalating into arson and clashes. *—PTI*

An IAF Rafale fighter jet takes off from the newly inaugurated Emergency Landing Facility on Moran Bypass in Dibrugarh district of Assam *—PTI*

India turns highway into runway for jets near China border

300km from LAC, the Assam runway boosts defence

NEW DELHI, 14 FEB

Less than 300 kilometres from the Line of Actual Control with China, India has converted a stretch of highway in Assam into a potential runway for fighter jets, enhancing its operational readiness along a sensitive frontier. Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated the Emergency Landing Facility (ELF) on the 4.2-kilometre Dibrugarh-Moran stretch of National Highway 127 on Saturday.

A video from the event showed Indian Air Force Sukhoi Su-30MKI and Rafale jets taking off from the Moran Bypass as the Prime Minister and other dignitaries looked on. The facility is designed as an alternative landing option if Dibrugarh Airport or Chabua Air Force Station becomes unavailable due to operational or emergency circumstances.

The Moran ELF, the first of its kind in Northeast India, strengthens strategic infrastructure near the China border. Highway-based landing strips provide redundancy and operational surprise, unlike fixed airbases that could be targeted in conflict scenarios. The stretch has no central divider, with fencing on both sides and temporary roadside structures removed to ensure safe operations.

Constructed in coordination with the Indian Air Force, the dual-use facility can handle fighter aircraft weighing up to 40 tonnes and transport aircraft up to 74 tonnes. It supports both landing and take-off operations and will also facilitate rapid deployment during rescue, relief, or strategic missions.

Prime Minister Modi made a historic landing at the facility aboard a C-130J aircraft, taking off from Chabua Airfield and landing on the Moran stretch. Posting on X, he said, "It is a matter of immense pride that the Northeast gets an Emergency Landing Facility."

The Rs 100-crore Moran ELF marks a significant geographic expansion of India's ELFs, which previously existed in western, northern, and central regions. Designed for civil and military use, the facility enhances defence preparedness, logistics, and disaster response capabilities in the strategically vital Northeast. *—PTI*

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SUSPENSE OVER HANDSHAKE AS INDIA FACES PAK

COLOMBO, 14 FEB

As India and Pakistan face off in their T20 World Cup clash, captains Suryakumar Yadav and Salman Ali Agha remained non-committal about a handshake before or after the match. Suryakumar, with a grin, said, "Wait for 24 hours," while Agha echoed, "Wait till tomorrow." The question of a handshake remains unanswered, with both players focusing on the game.

Since last year's Asia Cup in Dubai, following the Pahalgam massacre and Operation Sindoor, players from both sides have stopped shaking hands. When asked about the handshake, Suryakumar responded in his unique style, "Now wait for 24 hours for that. Why put so much focus on that? We have come to play cricket. We will play good cricket. We will take all those calls later tomorrow. Wait for it. Eat well and go to sleep."

Agha stated, "We will see about it tomorrow," but emphasised the importance of upholding the 'Spirit of the Game'. The Indian camp's mood is cautious, leaving the decision to officials, mindful of the emotions following the Pahalgam attack. *—PTI*

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BNP Chairperson Tarique Rahman shows victory sign after his party won the parliamentary election in Dhaka on Saturday *—CREDIT*

Hasina's extradition depends on legal process: BNP Chief

DHAKA, 14 FEB

Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) Chairperson and would be prime minister of Bangladesh, Tarique Rehman on Saturday said extradition of deposed prime minister Sheikh Hasina "depends on the legal process."

BNP leader Salahuddin Ahmed had also reiterated the party's firm stance on seeking Hasina's extradition from India to face trial.

BNP on 14 Februray secured a sweeping victory with more than two-thirds majority in the landmark Parliamentary elections.

A massive student-led protest ousted Hasina's Awami League regime on 5 August , 2024. Since then she has been living in exile in New Delhi as an Interim government led by Muhammad Yunus took charge three days later.

After a trial in absential, Hasina, 78, was found guilty of crimes against humanity by the country's International Crimes Tribunal (ICT) and sentenced to death. Her aide and former home minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal received a death sentence. Yunus' government had banned Awami League from participating in the 13th Parliamentary polls.

Bangladesh had sent a letter to India seeking her extradition and the foreign ministry demanded that she be immediately handed over to Dhaka under an extradition treaty in view of her sentencing. *—PTI*

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SINCE 9 FEBRUARY

Student from Karnataka goes missing in California

BENGALURU/ LOS ANGELES, 14 FEB

A 22-year-old Indian postgraduate student from Karnataka has gone missing in California, prompting efforts by US authorities and intervention by Indian officials.

Saketh Sreenivasaiah, a Master's student in Chemical and Biomolecular Engineering at the University of California, Berkeley, has been missing since 9 February, according to local reports. Police said he was last seen in the 1700 block of Dwight Way, while his roommate stated he was last spotted near Lake Anza in the Berkeley Hills.

His backpack, containing his passport and laptop, was later found on a doorstep in the Park Hills neighbourhood, The Berkeley Scanner reported. Sreenivasaiah is described as approximately 6 ft 1 in tall, weighing around 73 kg, with short black hair and brown eyes. Police have urged anyone with information to contact local law enforcement.

The Indian Consulate in San Francisco said it was "deeply concerned" and is in touch with the family and local authorities.

In Bengaluru, the Karnataka government has written to Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri, urging the Ministry of External Affairs to coordinate with US authorities and extend all assistance to trace the student and support his family.

Sreenivasaiah completed his BTech in Chemical Engineering from IIT-Madras in 2025. *—PTI*

EC MISSES DEADLINE FOR FINAL SIR VOTERS' LIST IN 9 STATES, 1 UT

PUDUCHERRY, 14 FEB

Nine states and three Union territories missed the original deadline to publish their final electoral rolls amid ongoing voters' list revision. However, Lakshadweep and Puducherry released their final rolls on Saturday as part of the Election Commission's second phase of the voters' list cleanup. Puducherry's chief electoral officer stated the final list contains 944,211 electors, while Lakshadweep has 57,607 electors. Announced on 27 October last year, phase two covers nearly 51 crore voters across these regions. The exercise was scheduled to conclude on 7 February, but the deadline was missed. Lakshadweep and Puducherry still published their rolls. Rajasthan's final list deadline has been extended to 21 February, while Tamil Nadu and Gujarat will publish theirs on the same day. Andaman, Kerala, Chhattisgarh, and Goa will follow on 21 February, with MP on 23 February. West Bengal's final list is scheduled for 28 February. *—PTI*

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K'taka govt gives away 1L title deeds to mark 1,000 days in office

HAVERI, 14 FEB

Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Saturday marked his government's 1,000 days in office, claiming it had set records in welfare and economic growth. He inaugurated celebrations and a programme to distribute title deeds to one lakh beneficiaries, organised jointly by the district administration and Revenue Department.

He stated, "We are distributing title deeds to one lakh beneficiaries for the second time through the Revenue Department. So far, we have created a record by distributing title deeds to 2.20 lakh families." He added the government's efforts had made Karnataka's GDP the highest in the country and that the state was leading in GST collection, backing these claims with data. Siddaramaiah highlighted that out of 590 promises, 243 had been fulfilled in the two years and nine months since taking office, with remaining promises expected to be completed soon. He recalled his previous tenure (2013-18), asserting the government fulfilled all promises and implemented 30 additional commitments, creating a record of "walking the talk".

He said that direct benefits via guarantee schemes amounted to Rs 1.18 lakh crore. "Our government has successfully completed 1,000 days in office. Only the Congress government walks the talk," he said, emphasising inclusivity for all castes, religions, and languages.

Countering BJP criticisms, he accused the opposition of spreading negative propaganda and said the central government was unjust to Karnataka, citing shortfalls in GST compensation and non-release of funds. *—PTI*

DyCM DK Shivakumar with CM Siddaramaiah during Congress govt's event to mark 1,000 days in power at Haveri on Saturday *—SALAR*

ENSURE DOCUMENTATION IS IN ORDER

'Form 7 will be used to delete Muslim, Dalit voters in K'taka'

BENGALURU, 14 FEB

AICC Secretary Mansoor Ali Khan on Saturday warned that the forthcoming Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in Karnataka could be misused to target minorities including Muslims, Dalits, migrant workers, women and tribals.

Addressing a press conference in Bengaluru on Saturday, Khan alleged that the Election Commission's Form No. 7, used to object to the inclusion of a name or to seek deletion from the voter list, had been misused in other states and the same will be done in Karnataka. Under the rules, an individual may object to only five names through Form 7. However, he claimed that in states such as Kerala, West Bengal, Bihar and Tamil Nadu, individuals had filed between 300 and 700 forms, leading to deletions without adequate verification.

"The purpose of the SIR should be to clean the voter lists. Instead, it is being used to target a section," Khan alleged.

The Special Intensive Revision is a nationwide exercise undertaken by EC to update electoral rolls by adding eligible citizens and removing ineligible entries.

AICC Secretary Mansoor Ali Khan addressees media in Bengaluru on Saturday *—SALAR*

Launched in Bihar in 2025, it was subsequently rolled out in nine poll-bound states.

According to Opposition, approximately 6.5 crore voters were removed from draft rolls across nine states and three Union Territories. They allege that minorities have been disproportionately affected.

Khan urged citizens to ensure their documentation was in order to avoid "harmful effects" before the revision process starts in Karnataka.

He noted that several institutions and associations in Bengaluru were already conducting awareness drives on SIR and voter mapping, a preliminary stage before the formal revision, but called for a larger, coordinated effort.

Khan said the matter had been discussed twice in the State Cabinet and that community leaders were closely monitoring developments. "Since the process has not yet officially started, no one has a clear picture," he said.

Bengaluru North District Congress Committee President Abdul Wajid, who was present, said mosques must conduct outreach programmes to ensure voters verify their names on the rolls. *—Salar News*

Cong asks DMK to give up seats it lost in 2021

CHENNAI, 14 FEB

Congress MP Manickam Tagore on Saturday stated that his party is only demanding the seats the DMK lost in the 2021 Tamil Nadu Assembly election, emphasising the need for power sharing.

Reacting to DMK leader RS Raja Kannappan's remark on February 13 in Madurai that the DMK plans to contest from 170 constituencies in 2026 and expects to win 160 seats, Tagore clarified, "In 2021, you contested in 173 seats and secured 133. What we are asking (now) are the seats which you failed to win." He added, "Power sharing is necessary. The share in power is our right," while sharing a video clip of Rajakannappan's speech. *—PTI*

50,000 people recite Hanuman Chalisa in Mysuru

MYSURU, 14 FEB

Devotees from all across the country partook in the Sri Hanuman Chalisa Parayana Maha Yagna at the Maharaja's College Grounds in Mysuru. Over 50,000 devotees took part in the event organised by Avadhoota Datta Peetham, Sri Ganapathi Sachchidananda Ashram for universal peace, including welfare of farmers and soldiers. People from all walks of life could be seen reciting the holy Hanuman Chalisa 18 tumes as the yagna was performed. The venue reverberated with slogans like "Rama Lakshma Janaki, Jai Bholo Hanuman Ki". Devotees danced to the bhajans, while waving saffron flags. Hanuma Rakshe were distributed to participants. An Anjaneyaswamy idol was installed at the podium. MLAs TS Srivatsa, GT Devegowda and K Harishgowda attended. *—Salar News*

Retired seer got govt promotion, says Ashoka

BENGALURU, 14 FEB

BJP leader R Ashoka alleged that an ascetic got a promotion even though he had taken voluntary retirement. Sri Nischalanandanatha Swamiji is the successor (Peetadhipathi) of the Vishwa Vokkaliga Mahasamsthana Mutt. Ashoka accused the Congress government of gross administrative negligence after a retired officer's name allegedly appeared in a recent promotion order issued by the State. The State government had issued an official order granting promotions to 20 Karnataka Administrative Service (KAS) officers, elevating several senior-grade officials, he said. The list included the name of HL Nagaraj, now known as Sri Nischalanandanatha Swamiji, who had taken voluntary retirement, he claimed. "In a Congress government of a thousand blunders, even a retired officer gets a service promotion!" Ashoka said on X. Alleging serious lapses in record-keeping, Ashoka said. In another post, Ashoka alleged that the Congress sent the family of journalist and former MLC P Ramaiah the bill for his funereal, despite him being accorded full State honours. *—PTI*

Rs 18,500 cr rail expansion to boost K'taka connectivity

Wll boost Hampi, Ballari & Tungabhadra tourism: Centre

NEW DELHI, 14 FEB

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs, chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, has approved three projects of the Railway Ministry entailing a cost of approximately Rs 18,509 crore. These projects include the construction of third and fourth lines between Kasara-Manmad, Delhi-Ambala, and Ballari-Hosapete, the government said in a statement on Saturday.

These three projects covering 12 Districts across Delhi, Haryana, Maharashtra and Karnataka, will increase the existing network of Indian Railways by about 389 Kms. The proposed multi-tracking project will enhance connectivity to approximately 3,902 villages, which are having a population of about 97 lakhs.

The proposed multi-tracking project will enhance connectivity to approximately 3,902 villages *–NEWS ON AIR*

This "will improve rail connectivity to several prominent tourist destinations across the country, including Bhavli Dam, Shri Ghatandevi, Trimbakeshwar Jyotirlinga, Shri Mata Vaishno Devi in Katra, Srinagar, and major attractions such as Hampi (a UNESCO World Heritage Site), Ballari Fort, Daroji Sloth Bear Sanctuary, Tungabhadra Dam, Kenchanagudda, and the Vijaya Vittala Temple, among others," it added.

"The projects are in line with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of a New India, which will make people in the region 'Atmanirbhar' through comprehensive development," the statement added.

Outlining the commercial gains for Railways, it said, "The proposed projects are on essential routes for the transportation of commodities such as coal, steel, iron ore, cement, limestone/bauxite, containers, food grains, sugar, fertilisers and POL, among others. The capacity augmentation works will result in additional freight traffic of 96 MTPA (million tonnes per annum)." It added that the lines will help reduce oil imports (by 22 crore litres) and lower CO2 emissions (by 111 crore kilograms), which is equivalent to the planting 4 crore trees. *—PTI*

WHILE PLAYING

Five-year-old boy falls into Bidar drain, dies

BIDAR, 14 FEB

REPRESENTATIONAL

A tragic incident has occurred in the district of Bidar, where a five-year-old boy, Avinash, lost his life while playing in front of his house in Mallikmarjapur village. The child fell into an open drain near the house and died, leaving the family in deep shock.

The tragedy took place around 6pm on Friday evening in Bidar. Avinash was playing in front of his house when he accidentally fell into a nearby open drain (gutter). Villagers suspect that in the excitement of playing, he may have run towards the drain and slipped.

The parents were inside the house, assuming their child was playing outside. When they did not hear his voice or any sound of crying, they began searching for him. The family searched around the house and nearby areas but could not find him. Nearly an hour later, the child was discovered in the drain, devastating the family.

The family and villagers immediately pulled the child out, but he had already stopped breathing. The Bagdal Police visited the spot and conducted an inspection. The body has been sent for post-mortem examination.

A case has been registered and further investigation is underway. *—Salar News*

THERE'S A VALENTINE FOR EVERYONE

Kannada activist Vatal Nagaraj symbolically weds two donkeys to celebrate Valentines Day, in Bengaluru, on Saturday *–MOHAMMED ASAD*

MIDDAY MEALS

Worm infested food served to students; headmistress suspended

MYSURU, 14 FEB

REPRESENTATIVE IMAGE

The headmistress of the Government Higher Primary School in Satyagala village in Kollegal Chamarajanagar has been suspended after worm infested midday meals were served to the students.

Following complaints against poor quality midday meals being served in the school, Chamarajanagar Deputy Director of Public Instruction (DDPI) constituted a committee comprising of Kollegal block education officer M Manjul and three other officials.

The committee inspected the school, its storage room and also questioned the headmistress, Hoovamma on the incident.

After worm -infested rice was found in the storage room during the inspection. Chamarajanagar DDPI Uday Kumar issued an order to suspend the headmistress of the school. *—Salar News*

Five armed men rob Rs 15,300 from petrol bunk in Mysuru

MYSURU, 14 FEB

A gang of armed robbers allegedly assaulted two employees of a gas station in Mysuru and looted Rs 15,300 from its office in the district, police said on Saturday.

The incident occurred on the night of 12 February at Swamy Service fuel station in Karimuddanahalli village in the Hunsur taluk of Mysuru district, they said.

The assault was captured on the petrol bunk's CCTV cameras, with the footage showing the accused engaging in a physical scuffle with the cashier. The video has since surfaced online and is being widely shared across social media platforms.

According to the FIR, the cashier, identified as Ajay Kumar, who has been working for the past four years at the fuel station alleged that at around 9.49pm on 12 February, a man in his 20's first came to the fuel station on the pretext of filling a water bottle. He returned and enquired about diesel. Later he arrived with four others in a car to seek diesel.

The police have registered a case in the incident. *—PTI*

Farmers protest seeking release of water in dry canal bed in Belagavi

BELAGAVI, 14 FEB

Farmers and residents of Belagavi laid down inside a dry irrigation canal on Friday evening, demanding the release of water before summer begins.

The demonstration was organised by people from plantation settlements, including Mahant Nagar in Donawad village of Chikkodi taluk in Belagavi. Protesters lay across the parched canal bed to draw attention to their demand that water be released through the Kotabagi lift irrigation canal.

They stated that the failure to supply water annually results in drinking water shortages during the summer, and urged authorities to ensure water reaches the tail-end of the canal without delay.

According to them, the 17km canal, maintained by the Karnataka Neeravari Nigam Limited, is expected to carry 178.62 cusecs of water. Despite silt removal efforts under the employment guarantee scheme to aid irrigation and domestic use, officials have been reluctant to release water, they alleged.

Farmers' leader Rachappa Shivapure claimed that water in some stretches is diverted into streams, preventing supply from reaching the end. Farmer Babu Magadum said cultivators are struggling to protect crops, while people and livestock face water shortages. *—Salar News*

'NO CONFUSION ON BJP-JD(S) ALLIANCE, FOCUS IS ON GBA POLLS'

BENGALURU, 14 FEB

Union Minister **HD Kumaraswamy** on Saturday said there was no confusion about the BJP-JD(S) alliance, dismissing speculations about the same. Speaking at a presser in Bengaluru, he said that discussions about a chief ministerial candidate were premature as the JD(S) was focusing on the upcoming Greater Bengaluru Authority (GBA) elections.

"This is not the time to discuss who should become the chief minister. There is still time for that. If we speak about it now, it would be like stitching the cradle even before the baby is born," Kumaraswamy said.

He clarified that there had been no discussions so far between the two parties specifically on local body or GBA elections.

The immediate priority was to remove an "anti-people government" in the State, he said.

"Removing this corrupt and bad government is my agenda. The JD(S) and BJP parties will work together to accomplish this task," he added.

He noted there were still two years left for the Assembly elections while there were four to five months left for the local body elections. *—PTI*

Banker arrested for gold mortgage fraud in the City

BENGALURU, 14 FEB

A deputy manager of a bank was arrested in the City for allegedly misappropriating and unauthorisedly mortgaging 2,780gms of gold ornaments belonging to multiple customers, worth over Rs 3.5 crore, police said on Saturday.

The alleged fraud came to light after the bank's chief manager filed a complaint against the accused at the Girinagar police station in the City on 5 February.

Citing the complaint, police said the accused allegedly removed 2,780gms of customers' gold ornaments from bank lockers without informing higher authorities and pledged them with a finance company.

During the investigation, officials found prima facie evidence suggesting that the accused had spent the proceeds on online betting.

"The accused has been arrested. We are trying to recover the gold. So far, 700gms have been recovered," said, deputy commissioner of police, Lokesh B Jagalasar said. *—PTI*

WILL HELP FARMERS: ISRO

NISAR to give soil moisture data every 13 days

BENGALURU, 14 FEB

NISAR is systematically imaging the Indian landmass in S-and L-bands to deliver high-resolution and wide swath data with 12 days repeativity, the ISRO said on Saturday.

This data has been effectively utilised to demonstrate the generation of soil-moisture products at a high resolution of 100m, it said.

Being a key indicator of crop health, irrigation needs and drought risk, soil-moisture plays a vital role in India's agriculture and water management, the space agency said.

An ISRO statement said the soil-moisture products, demonstrated using both S-and L-bands data, provide consistent estimates across India's diverse agro-climatic regions, that is, from irrigated plains and rain-fed farmlands to semi-arid and high-rainfall zones.

The physics-based soil moisture retrieval algorithm, developed at Space Applications Centre (SAC-ISRO), ensures scientific robustness, reliability and accuracy, it said.

"With the ability to deliver two observations every 12 days, NASA-ISRO Synthetic Aperture Radar (NISAR) enables near-real-time tracking of soil moisture dynamics. This frequent monitoring supports irrigation planning, drought preparedness, agrometeorological advisories, and regional water resource management," ISRO stated.

The 100m Level-4 operational soil moisture products will be systematically generated at the National Remote Sensing Centre. *— PTI*

Lulu opens store at Global Malls Divinity

Lulu Group India has strengthened its presence in Bengaluru with the launch of its fifth Lulu Daily store at Global Malls Divinity, Nayandahalli, Mysore Road. Opened on 14 February, 2026, the 21,500 sq ft. hypermarket marks a key milestone in the group's expansion across the City's fast-growing western corridor.

The grand inauguration drew thousands of shoppers from Nagarbhavi, Nayandahalli and nearby areas, with packed aisles and festive celebrations from 11 am onwards. Chief Guest DK Suresh and senior leadership including Ashraf Ali MA., Executive Director, graced the occasion alongside Nishad MA, Director and CEO, Lulu Group India, Fahaz Ashraf, Director and COO, Lulu Group India, Anand AV, Director of Lulu International Holdings, Swaraj NB, Media Head, Lulu Group India, Shereef KK, Regional Director of Lulu Karnataka Region, Jamal KP, Regional Manager, Lulu Karnataka Region and other Lulu dignitaries.

"The love and response we have received from the people of Bengaluru across our five stores is truly humbling," Ashraf stated.

The store features farm-fresh produce sourced directly from Karnataka farmers, premium meat and seafood counters, and an extensive range of groceries, gourmet foods, household essentials, electronics and apparel — all under one roof. Over 1,000 direct and indirect jobs have been generated.

Lulu Daily continues its neighbourhood market promise of convenience, quality and value for everyday shoppers. *—*Advertorial*

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QUOTE of THE DAY

Long live love. Love endures, thrives, and continues for a long time ... Valentine's Day is a celebration of love in all its forms and manifestations, in its widest and noblest sense

—MAMATA BANERJEE,
West Bengal Chief Minister

Cong neglected NE, promoted insurgency in Assam: Modi

PM unveils ₹3,030 cr bridge, IIM & data centre

GUWAHATI, 14 FEB

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday launched an all-out attack on the Congress, accusing it of neglecting the Northeast and promoting insurgency in Assam during its rule.

Addressing a public meeting here that also included BJP workers, Modi alleged that the Congress always endangered the nation's security, with fear and insecurity prevailing during its tenure in Assam.

''The Congress indulged in polarisation and vote bank politics, and took decisions that promoted these,'' he said.

''The partition of the country took place due to the Muslim League, but now there is 'MMC' – Maoist, Muslim League, Congress – and people should be aware,'' Modi said.

The PM accused the Congress of protecting infiltrators, but the BJP is "committed to end illegal immigration, and so the next five years are very important for the state''.

He also claimed that the Congress, being out of power in Assam for 10 years, is "more dangerous than when it was in power, and this is evident from the venomous statements made by its leaders".

The PM said all-round development is taking place in Assam due to the efforts of the BJP government.

Modi said, ''The BJP is committed to ensuring the speedy development of Assam and also protecting its identity and traditions. It is, therefore, very important that the double-engine BJP government returns to power in Assam."

Meanwhile, Modi inaugurated several projects in Assam, including a Rs 3,030 crore bridge on the Brahmaputra River, an IIM and a data centre for the northeastern region.

The projects, which were rolled out months ahead of Assam assembly elections, aim to boost connectivity, strengthen digital infrastructure, promote higher education and enhance public transport.

Modi reached the state on a day-long visit to inaugurate an emergency landing facility at Moran in Dibrugarh district and launch projects worth over Rs 5,500 crore. —*PTI*

Assam Governor Lakshman Prasad Acharya, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma at the inauguration of Kumar Bhaskar Varma Setu, in Guwahati, on Saturday —*PTI*

AHEAD OF ASSAM POLLS

Brahmaputra to get ₹18,662 cr underwater road-rail tunnel

NEW DELHI, 14 FEB

The Union Cabinet has approved Rs 18,662 crore to construct a four-lane access-controlled greenfield corridor between Gohpur and Numaligarh, featuring India's first road-cum-rail tunnel under the Brahmaputra river in Assam.

Currently, the connectivity between Numaligarh on NH715 and Gohpur on NH-15 is 240km, which takes six hours passing through Numaligarh, Kaziranga National Park, and Biswanath Town, the Ministry of Road Transport & Highways (MoRTH) said.

The project will be developed on an engineering-procurement-construction (EPC) model.

The project will provide significant benefit to Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland and other north-eastern states. It will also enhance the efficiency of freight movement, reduce logistics costs and drive socio-economic growth in the region.

The project provides seamless connectivity to key economic, social, and logistics nodes across Assam. Additionally, the project will enhance multi-modal integration by connecting with 11 economic nodes, 3 social nodes, 2 tourist nodes and 8 logistic nodes, providing enhanced connectivity with 4 major railway stations, 2 airports, and 2 inland waterways, thereby facilitating faster movement of goods and passengers across the region.

The project will also generate approximately 80 lakh person-days of direct and indirect employment.

Meanwhile, the government has approved road projects worth over Rs 11,000 crore in Maharashtra, Telangana and Gujarat.

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs approved the rehabilitation and upgradation of the Ghoti-Trimbak (Mokhada)-Jawhar-Manor-Palghar section of NH-160A in Maharashtra, construction of 4-lane sections of Dhamasiya-Bitada/ Movi and Nasarpore-Malotha in Gujarat and widening of NH-167 in Telangana. —*PTI*

Kumar Bhaskar Varma Setu across the Brahmaputra river, in Assam. —*PTI*

'Insult against Shankaracharya is verbal attack'

LUCKNOW, 14 FEB

Akhilesh Yadav on Saturday condemned alleged derogatory remarks against a Shankaracharya, calling them "verbal violence" and a sin. In a post on X, he said both the speaker and those who applauded in the House were guilty, and warned BJP MLAs would face public anger. He also accused the Uttar Pradesh government of lacking moral authority, alleging it had failed to disclose accurate Maha Kumbh death figures and details of compensation payments. Responding, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath told the Assembly that not everyone is entitled to use the title "Shankaracharya". He stressed the need for religious decorum and strict crowd control during events to prevent stampedes. —*PTI*

Sharad Pawar discharged, advised rest: Sule

PUNE, 14 FEB

Sharad Pawar, president of the Nationalist Congress Party (Sharad Pawar faction), was discharged from Ruby Hall Clinic in Pune on Saturday afternoon after treatment for a chest infection. The 85-year-old had been admitted earlier this week with breathing difficulties and a persistent cough. His daughter and NCP (SP) Working President, Supriya Sule, said he has been advised to rest for three to four days. The veteran leader, a former Union minister and oral cancer survivor, will recuperate at his Pune residence before returning to public. —*PTI*

Minor in M'rashtra poll booth: SEC suspends officials

MUMBAI, 14 FEB

The Maharashtra State Election Commission has suspended a polling officer and a police constable in Solapur after a minor was allowed inside a polling booth with his father, a candidate in the Zilla Parishad elections. A viral video showed a 14-year-old boy allegedly pressing EVM button at the Yashwant Nagar polling station in Akluj during the 7 February, ZP and Panchayat polls. The boy was accompanying his father, NCP (SP) candidate Arjun Sinh Mohite Patil. The panel termed the incident as breach of election rules, ordered immediate suspension of the two officials and initiated departmental proceedings. —*PTI*

11 IAS officers reshuffled overnight in MP

BHOPAL, 14 FEB

In a late-night administrative reshuffle, the Madhya Pradesh Government transferred 11 IAS officers, drawing criticism from the opposition Madhya Pradesh Congress, which alleged the move was meant to shield "corrupt" excise officials. Under orders issued at 1.55am, Ashok Barnwal was appointed Additional Chief Secretary (health), replacing Sandeep Yadav, who became Principal Secretary (forests) with additional charge of NRI department. Manish Singh returned as public relations commissioner while retaining charge as transport secretary. The Congress questioned the moves accountability. —*PTI*

'Govt cheating farmers, exporters over tariffs'

NEW DELHI, 14 FEB

Congress leader **Rahul Gandhi** on Saturday accused the government of cheating cotton farmers and textile exporters in the country over the India-US interim trade deal and said the agreement is likely to inflict serious damage on both sectors.

In a post on X, he said the government has neither protected the interests of cotton farmers nor those of textile exporters, as a visionary government would have negotiated a deal that protected both and ensured prosperity for both sectors.

"18 per cent Tariff vs 0 per cent - Let me explain how the Prime Minister and his cabinet are spreading confusion on this issue. And how they are cheating India's cotton farmers and textile exporters through the India-US trade deal," he said in his post.

Gandhi said Bangladesh is being given zero per cent tariff benefit on garment exports to the US - the only condition is that they import American cotton.

We kept hearing atmanirbhar, now it seems it has become Trump pe nirbhar

-Kapil Sibal, Rajya Sabha MP

Reacting to Rahul Gandhi's remarks Union Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal termed it as "immature" and lacking an understanding of the economy. He accused the opposition party of spreading misinformation as it had no constructive agenda to criticise the Narendra Modi government. —*PTI*

Rohit writes to Centre seeking a transparent probe in Ajit's death

PUNE, 14 FEB

MLA **Rohit Pawar** on Saturday said he has written to Union Home Minister Amit Shah seeking a comprehensive and probe into the 28 January plane crash that killed Ajit Pawar.

In a social media post, the Karjat-Jamkhed MLA said he has sent an email, along with a presentation marking his concerns, to Union Home Minister Amit Shah, Civil Aviation Minister K Rammohan Naidu, and the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA).

Rohit said the objective of his demand to ensure that the truth behind the accident is established beyond doubt.

He had earlier claimed there was reason to suspect sabotage in the tragic air crash.

Meanwhile, NCP and NCP (SP) leaders on Saturday sharpened their attacks on each other with regards to the merger process of the two factions as well as an article written on Ajit.

While NCP leader Anand Paranjpe sought an apology for the article, NCP (SP) state unit Chief Shashikant Shinde, who wrote the article, said the merger issue had been closed by the Sharad Pawar-led outfit.

Shinde said the party had now decided to focus on rebuilding itself. —*PTI*

SHARAD PAWAR TO CONTEST RS POLLS: RAUT

Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Sanjay Raut claimed that NCP (SP) chief Sharad Pawar intends to contest the upcoming Rajya Sabha elections, with the opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) set to discuss it. Raut said, "I asked Sharad Pawar saheb if he would contest the polls. He told me he would." Pawar, 85, has informed Congress of his decision, Raut added. The MVA will hold discussions, as seven members, including Pawar, retire in April. Raut also dismissed prospects of a merger between the two NCP factions, stating, "The chances are slim." —*PTI*

Rahul's policy is to lie loudly and repeat it, says Shah

KARAIKAL, 14 FEB

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Saturday slammed Congress leader Rahul Gandhi for misleading them with "lies" and trying to create an "illusion".

Shah asserted that the interests of Indian farmers and fishermen have been fully secured in the recent FTAs and the Indo-US trade deal signed by the country.

Launching a scathing attack on the leader, Shah charged that Gandhi "has started a new tradition of telling lies daily" and asked him to "carefully" go through the fine print of the recent deals clinched with the UK and EU, besides the US, which has particularly come under sharp attack from the Congress MP.

"Its Rahul Gandhi's policy to lie, lie loudly, repeat it. But people have identified your lie manufacturing factory," he said.

"Rahul Gandhi wants to mislead the country's fishermen and farmers. He intends to spread illusion by telling lies," Shah charged. —*PTI*

Sapkal compares Tipu Sultan to Shivaji, sparks row

NAGPUR/BULDHANA, 14 FEB

Maharashtra Congress chief Harshwardhan Sapkal sparked outrage by suggesting equivalence between Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj and 18th-century Mysuru ruler Tipu Sultan.

Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis condemned the comment as "shameful," asserting Maharashtra would not tolerate such comparisons.

Tipu Sultan remains a polarising figure, praised for his bravery against the British but criticised for alleged bigotry and mistreatment of Hindus.

Shivaji Maharaj is widely respected for his military genius and benevolent governance.

Sapkal was speaking in Buldhana regarding a controversy over Tipu Sultan's portrait in Malegaon Municipal Corporation, opposed by Shiv Sena corporators and Hindu groups.

While highlighting Shivaji's valor and the concept of Swarajya, Sapkal claimed Tipu Sultan's call for battle against the British was on similar lines, stating, "Tipu Sultan emerged as a warrior and a bhoomiputra of Bharat. He never embraced poisonous ideologies. We should regard Tipu Sultan on par with Shivaji Maharaj."

Fadnavis responded sharply, urging Sapkal to apologise and calling the comparison condemnable.

Later, Sapkal posted on X, defending Tipu Sultan's valour and asserting that he fought the British inspired by Shivaji. —*PTI*

A photo from 2015 shows BJP leader BS Yediyurappa dressed as Tipu Sultan. While Devendra Fadnavis now criticises the ruler, experts note that BJP leaders had reportedly praised Tipu Sultan prior to 2014 —*PTI*

ANDHRA TABLES RS 3.32L CRORE BUDGET FOR 2026-2027

AMARAVATI, 14 FEB

Seeking to strike a balance between welfare and development, the Andhra Pradesh government on Saturday presented a Budget of over Rs 3.32 lakh crore for 2026-27, and said that the state was financially "yet to come out of the woods," following the "mess" created by the previous YSRCP regime.

The budget size was up by Rs 10,000 crore from FY26, with an estimated revenue expenditure of Rs 2.56 lakh crore and capital expenditure of nearly Rs 54,000 crore.

While presenting the Budget, Finance Minister Payyavula Keshav said the estimated revenue deficit would be around Rs 22,000 crore.

Highlighting the Visakhapatnam Economic Region, he said it entails seven growth drivers, which translate into 41 high-impact projects with a proposed investment of Rs 28,000 crore, including metro rail projects. —*PTI*

T'gana poll: Karimnagar to get BJP mayor

HYDERABAD, 14 FEB

The BJP is set to secure the Mayor's position in Karimnagar with support from independents, having emerged as the largest party in the municipal corporation elections.

The party has also decided to sit in opposition in Nizamabad. In Karimnagar, out of 66 wards, BJP won 30, Congress 14, BRS 9, AIMIM 3, AIFB 3, and independents 7. Three independents and an AIFB corporator met Union MoS (Home) **Bandi Sanjay Kumar** to support the BJP, with six more corporators holding talks. Kumar, as an ex-officio member, can vote, raising BJP's strength to 35. In Nizamabad, despite winning 28 of 60 wards, BJP chose to oppose, citing an "unholy alliance" between Congress and AIMIM. In Kothagudem, Congress and CPI each secured 22 wards, with others winning fewer seats. The polls for Mayors and other positions will be held on 16 February. —*PTI*

The Telangana local body polls win is a clear endorsement of Congress government's people-first policies rooted in social justice, dignity, and inclusive growth.

-Rahul Gandhi, Congress leader

'WEAKENED DEMOCRATIC PARTICIPATION'

SC ignored WB's SIR grievances: Cong leader

KOLKATA, 14 FEB

Senior Congress leader P Chidambaram has said the Supreme Court's recent order on SIR did not address the grievances raised by the West Bengal government, contending that "specific directions" from the top judiciary were required to make the Election Commission (EC) resolve the issues.

Criticising the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in West Bengal by calling it an exercise that "weakened democratic participation" and one that intends to "alter the electoral balance in the state", Chidambaram said.

A Supreme Court Bench comprising Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justices Joymalya Bagchi and NV Anjaria had on Monday ordered an extension of the time for objections by a week from 14 February in Bengal SIR case. The matter is listed for hearing on 25 February.

The order followed an earlier hearing on the matter on petitions filed by West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee and others. She urged top court to intervene in the ongoing SIR to "save democracy".

Senior Congress leader P Chidambaram —*PTI*

SIR HEARINGS END ACROSS

The hearing for 'logical discrepancy' cases in the SIR concluded across West Bengal on Saturday, a senior EC official said, adding that the final electoral rolls is scheduled to be published on 28 February. The hearings, which addressed omissions and inconsistencies in name spellings, began on 27 December and continued across the state at camps set up in schools, club rooms and administrative buildings. —*PTI*

—SCREENGRAB

Pak drone drops heroin in Jammu village, seized

JAMMU, 14 FEB

Over 6.5kg of heroin worth over Rs 40 crore was seized in the RS Pura sector during a joint operation by the BSF and the police. The contraband was recovered from Nai Basti Karotana village after intelligence about a drone dropping material from across the border. Police received information about suspected drone activity between 13 and 14 February. Two yellow packets containing 6.582kg heroin were found and seized, described as a "significant achievement." A case under NDPS Act has been registered, and investigations are going on. The police urged residents to report illegal activities. —*PTI*

—ANI

Bomb hoax holds up Shillong-bound flight in Kolkata

KOLKATA, 14 FEB

A Shillong-bound IndiGo flight was stranded for four hours after a bomb threat. The flight 6E 7304 was moved to the isolation bay after a handwritten note claimed a bomb was onboard. The threat proved false, and the aircraft departed at 1.33pm after a thorough search. An AAI spokesperson said the note was found in the lavatory at 9.15am, 15 minutes before departure. Some of the 60 passengers had boarded. The passengers were safely deboarded, and the aircraft was cleared following safety protocols. After the completion of all safety checks and clearance by security authorities, the aircraft was declared safe for operations, the Airport Authority of India spokesperson added. —*PTI*

Civilian, 3 CRPF men, killed in Ch'garh car crash

DHAMTARI, 14 FEB

A car crash in Dhamtari district killed three CRPF men and a civilian. The accident occurred near Khapri village on the Dhamtari bypass of the Jagdalpur-Raipur Highway. The deceased were from the 201st battalion of CoBRA. The vehicle was travelling from Jagdalpur to Raipur for leave when it collided with a stationary truck. Initial reports suggest the driver may have fallen asleep, causing the crash. The deceased included Saurabh Tomar, Mukesh Kumar, Rajkumar God, and the driver Heeralal Nagar. Officer Abhiman Rai was injured and was referred to a hospital for treatment. —*PTI*

—PTI

Old lady honoured for confronting traffic violator

KOZHIKODE, 14 FEB

Prabhavathi Amma, 73, was honoured by Kerala MVD after confronting a scooter rider on the footpath near Erangipalam bypass. She stood her ground and made him return to the road, demonstrating age is no barrier. The incident's video went viral, earning widespread praise. MVD officials visited her home and presented her with a shawl. She said, "He told me to make way, and I asked where I should go. I told him the footpath is meant for pedestrians and the road is for vehicles." Authorities suspended the scooter rider's licence for violating road traffic rules. —*PTI*

1 dead as Mumbai Metro parapet falls on auto, car

Three people injured in the mishap hospitalised, 1 critical

MUMBAI, 14 FEB

A person died and three others were injured when a slab of the girder bridge of the under-construction metro rail line 4 collapsed on some vehicles in Mumbai's Mulund area on Saturday, police said.

A slab of the parapet wall of the girder bridge fell near Johnson and Johnson factory on the LBS Road on an autorickshaw and a car heavily damaging them.

A fire brigade official identified the dead as Ramdhan Yadav and the injured as Rajkumar Indrajeet Yadav, 45, Mahendra Pratap Yadav, 52, and Deepa Ruhiya, 40.

The condition of Rajkumar is critical. He is in ICU, while Mahendra and Ruhiya are stable, the official added.

The Mumbai Metropolitan Regional Development Authority said a portion of the parapet segment fell at 12:15pm near pier 196 of the metro line near Mulund Fire Station on an autorickshaw.

The Metro project team is securing the site along with the BMC and disaster management authorities, the statement said, adding an investigation is underway to find the cause of the collapse.

Line 4 is under construction and it connects Wadala in south-central Mumbai to Thane. A large section of it passes over the LBS Road connecting Ghatkopar, Vikhroli, Bhandup, Mulund etc.

Meanwhile, Congress leader Varsha Gaikwad slammed the state government over the incident and asked whether the lives of Mumbai residents had "become so cheap."

In a post on X, she said the authorities were now focused on publicity around infrastructure projects than ensuring public safety.

She demanded accountability from authorities, raising concerns over alleged lapses in safety measures at the site, particularly given the heavy traffic movement in the area.

She also questioned whether quality and technical safety standards were being compromised to complete the metro quickly, and said repeated announcements of inquiries after such incidents were not sufficient. — *PTI*

People gather near damaged vehicles after a slab of the under-construction metro rail line 4 girder bridge crashed killing a man and injuring 3 —*PTI*

- Congress leader Varsha Gaikwad slammed the state government over the incident and asked whether the lives of Mumbaikars had "become so cheap." She said the authorities now give more importance to publicity than safety

TDB denies reports about misuse of Ayyappa Sangamam funds

THIRU'PURAM, 14 FEB

The Travancore Devaswom Board (TDB) on Saturday dismissed media reports regarding the audit findings of the recent Global Ayyappa Sangamam and rejected such reports as "factually incorrect."

It also accused certain media outlets of "indulging in false propaganda" on the event's cost.

The Sangamam was organised on 20 September 2025 at Pamba in connection with the Platinum Jubilee celebrations of the TDB, which manages hundreds of shrines, including the Sabarimala Lord Ayyappa temple.

In a statement, the TDB clarified that neither the Devaswom audit report nor the report submitted by the Special Commissioner before the High Court contained any reference to expenditure incurred for purchasing a cot for Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan, who attended the Sangamam.

It is surprising how such a news report was circulated, the Board said, adding that an amount of Rs 3,83,439 was allocated for Furniture and Miscellaneous Items for the existing office complex and guest house in an estimate submitted on 4 November 2025, for admissible expenses.

Any item purchased for the Devaswom Guest House remains the property of the Devaswom, it said, terming as "misinterpretation" the media reports that Rs one lakh was spent to buy a cot for the CM.

The Board said the renovation work at the Pamba Guest House, which accommodates Union Ministers and judges were wrongly portrayed in some media reports as a special arrangement for the Chief Minister. — *PTI*

Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan had addressed the Global Ayyappa Sangamam held in September 2025 —*ANI*

Six-year-old boy dies during MRI scan in Greater Noida

NOIDA, 14 FEB

A six-year-old boy died allegedly during an MRI procedure at a private diagnostic centre in Greater Noida, with his family accusing the facility of negligence and administration of expired medicine or an overdose, officials said on Saturday.

The facility was sealed on Friday, and a four-member committee was formed to probe the incident, Dr Chandan Soni of the Gautam Buddha Nagar Health Department told PTI. "The cause of death is not known and will be determined after the enquiry, Soni said.

The incident occurred on Thursday when the child, a resident of Dungarpur village, was taken to the diagnostic centre located in the Pie-3 area for an MRI scan. His family claimed that the boy was normal before the procedure, but negligence led to his death.

The boy's father, Vicky, has lodged a complaint at the Beta-2 police station against the diagnostic centre. — *PTI*

MAN SHOOTS GIRLFRIEND, SELF INSIDE CAR

NOIDA, 14 FEB

A 32-year-old man allegedly shot dead his 26-year-old girlfriend before turning the gun on himself inside a parked car in Sector 107 here, police said on Saturday.

The bodies were found inside the car parked near pillar number 84 on Dadri Road on Saturday.

Police said they were alerted about the car, which had the registration number DL14CL6473.

Additional Deputy Commissioner of Police (Noida) Manisha Singh told PTI, "A man and a woman were found inside the car with gunshot wounds on their heads. A pistol was found in the man's hand, and the car was locked from the inside. Prima facie, it appears to be a suicide." The dead Sumit, was a resident of Trilokpuri in Delhi, and Rekha, was a resident of Sector 101 in Noida. — *PTI*

Help is available. Please call Tele Manas at 14416, or SAHAI at 080-25497777 for support

SC to hear pleas against Assam CM over hate video on 16 Feb

NEW DELHI, 14 FEB

The Supreme Court is slated to hear on Monday petitions seeking action against Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma over a viral video allegedly showing him taking aim and firing with a rifle at members of a particular community.

Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justice Joymalya Bagchi are likely to hear the matter. On 10 February, the court had agreed to consider listing a plea of the Left seeking action against Sarma.

Referring to the Assembly polls in Assam, the court said that the problem is that a part of the elections is fought before it. It had taken note of the submissions of lawyer Nizam Pasha, appearing for CPI and CPI(M) leaders, against Sarma.

The video of Sarma purportedly taking aim with a rifle and firing at two people, one wearing a skull cap and the other with a beard, was shared by the Assam BJP on its X handle on 7 February.

The post sparked outrage. It was deleted by the BJP after it was accused of inciting communal hatred. Pleas were also filed by the CPI (Marxist) and CPI leader Annie Raja seeking the registration of FIRs against Sarma for hate speech aimed at communal polarisation. They also sought the setting up of a SIT by the court as an independent probe was not expected from state and central agencies. — *PTI*

'STAY OUT OF POLITICS'

Arundhati quits Berlin film fest over jury chief's Gaza comment

NEW DELHI, 14 FEB

Booker prize-winning author Arundhati Roy has announced that she will not attend the Berlin International Film Festival due to the "unconscionable statements" made by the members of the festival jury about "the genocide in Gaza." She was scheduled to attend the festival for the screening of her 1989 film 'In Which Annie Gives It Those Ones' under the classics section.

The "The God of Small Things" author said that "to hear the jury say that art should not be political is jaw-dropping," says a statement published in 'The Wire' on Friday.

"This morning, like millions of people across the world, I heard the unconscionable statements made by members of the jury of the Berlin film festival when they were asked to comment about the Gaza genocide. To hear them say that art should not be political is shocking. It is a way of shutting down a conversation about a crime against humanity as it unfolds before us," she said.

This year's jury is headed by German filmmaker Wim Wenders and includes American director-producer Reinaldo Marcus Green, Japanese filmmaker Hikari, Nepalese director Min Bahad ur Bham, South Korean actor Bae Doona, Indian director-producer Shivendra Singh Dungarpur, and Polish filmmaker Ewa Puszczyńska.

At a press meet on Thursday, jury president German director Wim Wenders was asked about his views on "Germany's support for the genocide in Gaza" to which he said filmmakers "must stay out of all politics." — *PTI*

Yogi takes a swipe at Delhi's poor AQI, hails UP's good air

GORAKHPAUR, 14 FEB

Comparing the air quality in New Delhi to that of a 'gas chamber', UP Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath asserted on Saturday that the people of Uttar Pradesh enjoy a clean environment, despite development projects.

Speaking at an event in Gorakhpur, Adityanath said that one of the biggest global challenges today is environmental degradation. "The environment here is good. Without pollution, there are fewer diseases. Whenever pollution exists, it harms the lungs. If our supply of oxygen is compromised, the entire body suffers," he explained.

Adityanath was addressing the inaugural ceremony of the renovated BDO office in Gorakhpur, the UP government said. — *PTI*

HC flags delayed pregnancy detection in rape cases

PRAYAGRAJ, 14 FEB

The Allahabad High Court has observed that although standard operating procedures are in place for medical termination of pregnancy up to 24 weeks, the courts are still facing petitions filed by rape victims who often realise that they are pregnant only at a later stage.

Dealing with a suo moto PIL in which a minor rape victim sought termination of her pregnancy, Justice Saumitra Dayal Singh and Justice Indrajeet Shukla on 6 February sought an affidavit by the principal secretary (medical health and family welfare) in charge of women and child health in UP.

"Rape victims often realise that they are pregnant late and sometimes time is lost," the bench said. It also said that the state must have schemes for rape victims arry their pregnancies full term and also where they may want to give the child for adoption.

The court also highlighted the need to preserve the foetus for trial. — *PTI*

- It also said the state must have schemes for rape victims who carry their pregnancies full term and for those who want to give up their children for adoption

PULWAMA ATTACK ON CRPF

Pulwama Shiksha Niketan students pay tribute on Friday to the CRPF soldiers who were martyred in the 2019 Pulwama attack —*ANI*

Wounds still fresh for martyrs' kin

PULWAMA, 14 FEB

On the seventh anniversary of the 2019 terror attack in J&K's Pulwama, the families of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) personnel who died that day paid tribute to their loved ones. However, some of them are still waiting for the honours promised to their fallen kin.

Sukhjit Kaur, the widow of CRPF constable Jaimal Singh, lamented that a stadium named after her husband has not been built. A memorial gate on Ghalauti Road, which was to be constructed in his honour, is incomplete, she said.

"Only we know how difficult it is to spend a life without him," Kaur told PTI Videos here. She added that her son, who was just five-and-a-half years old when he lost his father, is now 12 and remembers him often. "He now understands that what has happened cannot be changed," Kaur said.

Jaimal, a resident of Ghalauti village in Punjab's Moga district, was driving the CRPF bus that was blown up by terrorists on 14 February 2019.

In Tarn Taran's Gandiwind village, the family of martyr Sukhjinder Singh honoured his sacrifice and recalled his memories.

Sukhjinder's brother, Gurjant Singh, called for a government school named after Sukhjinder to be upgraded to include classes up to 12th grade. He also urged for the completion of an under-construction stadium dedicated to Sukhjinder.

Meanwhile, CRPF chief Gyanendra Pratap Singh reaffirmed the force's dedication to eliminating terrorism.

Paying tribute to the 40 CRPF personnel killed in the 2019 Lethpora attack in south Kashmir, Singh said, "The CRPF is duty-bound to wipe out terrorism."

The top brass of the CRPF, along with senior officers from the army and the J&K Police, paid floral tributes at the site of the attack. — *PTI*

Doda police display wanted ultras' photos

Doda police have launched a poster campaign seeking information on active terrorists, including Pakistani Jaish-e-Mohammad commander Saifullah. Posters are displayed at key checkpoints and public spots, urging locals to share credible information confidentially. Security forces recently discovered a terrorist hideout in Chilli forest, Gandoh, recovering blankets and eatables, prompting intensified combing operations.

Over the past month, searches across Doda, Kishtwar, Kathua, Udhampur, Rajouri, and Poonch have led to nearly a dozen encounters, killing four Pakistani JeM militants and an army soldier. Operations continue after locals reported suspicious movements in Thathri and Gandoh. — PTI

CJI: Judiciary suffers when we pretend judges are perfect

NEW DELHI, 14 FEB

Chief Justice of India Surya Kant said that judicial leadership does not suffer if judges are imperfect, but it is adversely impacted if judges pretend that they are not so.

The CJI also called for a radical shift in how judicial leadership is perceived, advocating for the creation of a 'Commonwealth Apex Body' to integrate judicial education, the Bar, and the bench across member nations.

Delivering the keynote address at the opening ceremony of the 11th biennial meeting of the Commonwealth Judicial Educators (CJEs) here, Justice Surya Kant said that judges, like judicial institutions, remain capable of growth, correction, and improvement. — *PTI*

A PINCH OF OPTIMISM CAN TURN THE TIDE: RAM PUNIYANI

BY ASMA

It is rather bleak out there. India seems to be going through one of its darkest periods in current history with all round incertitude.

There are daily contentions by the Opposition parties accusing the Narendra Modi-led government of succumbing to US pressures, of deteriorating relations with our neighbours, the controversial ongoing Special Intensive Revision (SIR) exercise in the poll-bound states with allegations of minorities, especially Muslims, being deliberately left out of the electoral process. These, along with ever-increasing inflation, relentless taxation, crumbling infrastructure and the indifference of politicians has left the citizens with little hope.

In these circumstances, a meeting with writer, activist and human rights crusader Ram Puniyani comes as a breath of fresh air. "With a pinch of optimism, you can tilt things in a positive direction," says 80-year-old Puniyani, smiling, when I ask him why he continues his struggle against communalism just as he did 34 years ago in the wake of the 1992 Babri Masjid demolition.

"There are obstacles, but they are not insurmountable," he says. "On one hand you see someone like Himanta Biswa Sarma and the hate-fuelled politics that is being practiced in the country. On the other hand, you see someone like Mohammed Deepak and you know there is hope. There is hope in the new generation. A lot of youngsters want to see employment, healthcare, scientific development. They are not so easily swayed by religious propaganda."

How did Puniyani, a medical doctor and an IIT Bombay professor, become an activist?

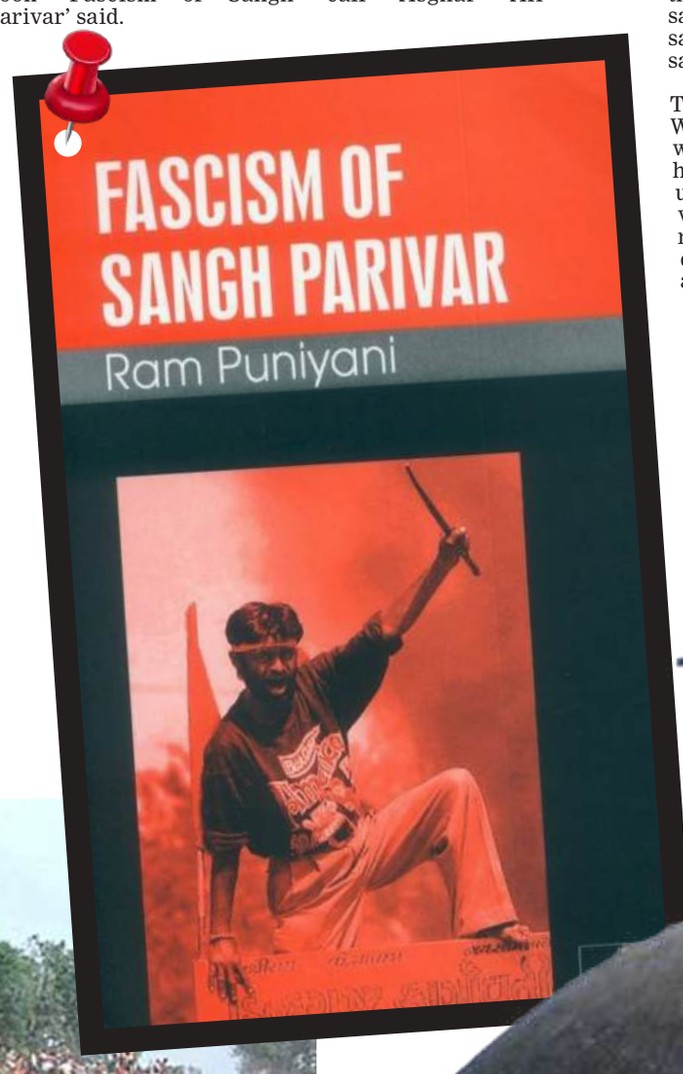
"I come from a refugee family," Puniyani says. "When we came to India from Pakistan (during the Partition), my parents had to struggle to make ends meet. I often did not see my father in my childhood because he worked long hours. I did well in school and college and secured myself a seat in Nagpur Medical College. It is there that I confronted real, devastating poverty for the first time."

"The long queues of people before the OPDs and the desperation of the poor to get help when someone was unwell was nothing like what I had known as a child, even though I came from a relatively poor family."

"One day, I saw a long queue before the blood bank. I first thought people had lined up to get blood for those who were ill. When I realised that people had queued up NOT to procure blood for their loved ones but to sell blood for a few rupees, I was terribly shaken. I realised that I wanted to do something more than just medicine. In my spare time, I began working with trade unions, mostly as a researcher trying to understand the lives of the poor in the country."

The turning point for Puniyani came in 1992. Like many others in the country, he had not expected the demolition of the Babri Masjid. "However, I quickly realised that this was not just the breaking of one mosque, but a direct attack on democracy," he says. Puniyani began studying the issue closely to understand the fascism of the Sangh Parivar. "I soon realised that the RSS was not just against Muslims, but they were against Christians, Adivasis, Dalits, and women as well."

Dwelling a little into history, Puniyani recounts that before 1975, the only identity that the RSS had was of those who were associated with the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi. In 1975, the RSS joined hands with the Bihar's JP movement and began piggybacking on its success. In the elections that followed, Congress was defeated and LK Advani, a known RSS man, became the Information and Broadcasting Minister in the Janata Party government and he began filling the media with RSS sympathisers. That is the effect we are seeing today, the author of the 1999 book 'Fascism of Sangh Parivar' said.



After Babri demolition, noted social reformer Asghar Ali Engineer had set up an organisation called EKTA (Committee for Communal Harmony) to combat the spread of communalism in the country. Puniyani joined EKTA's study circle, began reading books and attending lectures. "In a way you can call Asghar Ali Engineer my mentor. We also became very firm friends," he says fondly recalling his time with Engineer.

Somewhere around that time Puniyani decided to take a break and devoted his time to the cause of promoting secularism. "The work is important. It is not just about fighting for the Muslims or the minorities. It is about saving democracy. It is about saving the Constitution," he says.

"Look at the situation today. The farmers are unhappy. Workers are unhappy. The way women's issues are being handled, many women are unhappy. The BJP has lost its vote base and this is the reason why they are depending on muscle power and manipulation, why they are trying to prevent people from voting by removing them from the voters list."

According to Puniyani, change does not rest on electoral politics alone. A four-layered plan of action is necessary for things to change.

THE ACTION PLAN

The first layer is at the level of the community. We need to build strong community centers to propagate the truth about what is really happening in the country, to clear the existing misconceptions and call out on the half-truths.

At the second layer, we have to learn how to use social media effectively.

The third layer would be the coming together of all Human Rights groups, which would bring pressure on all political parties both from the bottom - in terms of citizen's awareness - and from the top - in terms of judicial interventions.

The fourth layer would be proper political intervention – there is a need for a clear electoral plan. India Bloc was a good experiment but there is a need for more such initiatives.

Puniyani said that there is a plan to begin a citizens initiative called Eddelu India (Wake up, India) on the lines of Eddelu Karnataka, a popular citizens collective in the State which played a crucial role during the 2023 Karnataka Assembly elections by spreading awareness among citizens.

"We are a neo-capitalist society," Puniyani says. "The income differentiation is very high in India with the top 10 per cent holding nearly 50 per cent of the country's wealth. Added to that are the attempts by the current government to abolish the public sector. This, he says, is dangerous. India is a country that has been built on the power of the public sector companies. The current challenge before us is also to protect and preserve our public sector, without surrendering it to the political powers."

WHY DOES THE SANGH HAVE AN AMBIVALENT ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE MINORITIES?

Puniyani also called out on the blow hot-blow cold attitude towards Muslims and other minorities. He said the RSS-BJP ideology gets a lot of flak in international circles and it serves them well to pretend that they are friends with the Muslims and other minorities. In India, however, the Muslims are always presented as invaders, outsiders, illegal immigrants to their core cadre.

WILL INDIA SEE A REVOLUTION ON THE LINES OF A FARMER'S STRUGGLE?

It cannot be ruled out, Puniyani says. It is possible that the youth can come together against social and economic injustice. The rulers are arrogant about being are right when they are actually in the wrong.

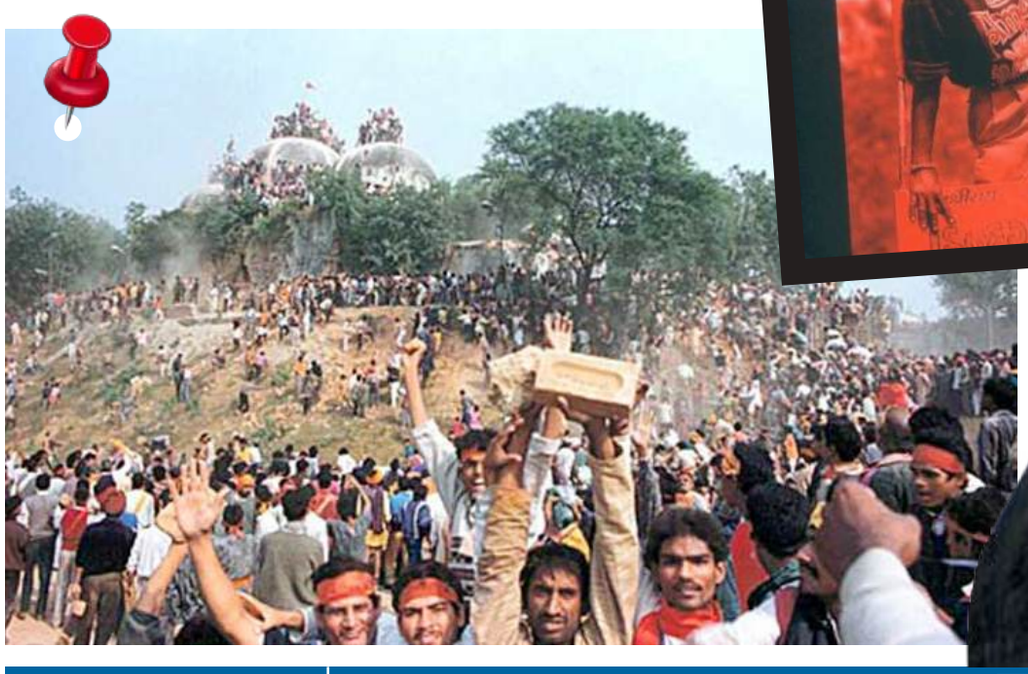
Look at something like the dismantling of MNREGA and replacing it with GRAMG. MNREGA was a rights-based initiative which worked on the basic principle that people in rural areas had a right to employment in their own settings and it was the duty of the government to provide that employment. GRamG, on the other hand, is a pre-approved plan of providing employment with the type and duration of the employment resting on the government.

WHERE DOES AN ACTIVIST, SCHOLAR AND POLITICAL OBSERVER LIKE PUNIYANI SEE INDIA 50 YEARS FROM NOW?

Things are going to be difficult, he says. We are already dealing with communalism and crony capitalism. The joker in the pack is AI. There is a widespread fear that people are going to start losing their jobs because of AI. If that happens, we will have to think of something like universal basic income. And in a country like India where the caste system is so rampant, it will have terrible ramifications, with only a certain section of the society benefitting.

Times are tough for India, Puniyani says. Today, India is battling two major evils – hatred and selfishness. It is for the right-minded people to remain committed to humanism and bypass/fight the forces of hatred and selfishness, he says.

Ram Puniyani is an author, social activist and human rights crusader. An alumnus of the Nagpur Medical College, Puniyani was a senior medical officer with the Indian Institute of Technology Bombay. He has been involved in several initiatives opposing the growth of Hindu fundamentalism in India. He is currently serving as the President of the Executive Council of the Centre for Study of Society and Secularism (CSSS).



INDIA TURNS TO AI TO TACKLE SPACE DEBRIS

- Space engineers in India and across the world are using artificial intelligence to track more than a million orbits of such debris to determine their possible collision with active satellites and space assets.

—FREEPIK

A tiny piece of junk may be harmless on Earth, but even the slightest impact from such debris hurtling through space at high speed can prove fatal for a spacecraft.

There are more than a million such objects of one centimetre in size and bigger orbiting the Earth, tracked continuously by experts to prevent collision accidents that can put a billion-dollar space mission in jeopardy.

Space engineers in India and across the world are using artificial intelligence to track more than a million orbits of such debris to determine their possible collision with active satellites and space assets.

"There have been a lot of cases where at least per year, we have seen more than 15 conjunction, close proximity warnings for a single 50-kg satellite," Anirudh Sharma, founder and CEO of Digantara Industries, told PTI.

Digantara specialises in the area of space situational awareness, which means keeping a track of objects orbiting in space that include active and defunct satellites, remnants of disintegrated satellites and even asteroids that zip past in space.

"When we do space domain awareness, we primarily track objects. It is important for us to know where this object will be, let's say, seven days later, for which we currently use statistical models because they are proven and have been adopted for ages," he said.

Sharma said on the analytic side, Digantara has designed a software for a space domain awareness application, which uses AI to primarily assess any changes, patterns or violations of objects in orbit.

"As orbital congestion rises, India's emerging focus on space situational awareness and debris monitoring underscores why trustworthy AI is now a safety imperative, not a nice-to-have," Lt Gen A K Bhatt (retd), Director General of Indian Space Association (ISpA), said.

Pixxel Space, the Bengaluru-based start-up building a constellation of Earth observation satellites, has been using AI to sift through the vast space imagery data it collects from satellites.

"I think artificial intelligence is very well suited to a data set like satellite imagery because there are petabytes and petabytes of this data that no human can possibly sit down and go through," Awais Ahmed, founder and CEO of Pixxel Space, told PTI.

He said AI models can go through all data and monitor the minutest of changes that are taking place to ensure better action on issues relating to areas as diverse as border security, agricultural farms, yield of crops, oil and gas leaks or sources of pollution.

Ahmed said Pixel has an AI platform called Aurora, where several models are already built in to make sure that a combination of four data sets -- very high resolution data, hyperspectral data, SAR data and multisspectral data -- can be combined to provide a holistic view.

He said advances in the field of AI have also made it possible to shift data centres to space-based platforms.

"Being able to just put GPUs and compute on satellites and launch quite a few of them and utilise the free solar power that you get there, we could take images of a certain area, completely analysed in orbit and only the report or the insight can be downlinked," Ahmed said.

Digantara's Sharma believes that AI certainly will benefit a lot of space applications that are happening all across the world at this point in time.

"One of the things that we are very keen on is autonomous satellite operations, which means if there is debris or an active satellite coming close to you, it should automatically learn that there is an object within a certain vicinity and then tend to avoid a collision," he said.

Digantara is working on the use of an algorithm that can be fed onto its next bunch of satellites, enabling them to communicate with each other and apply some concepts of autonomous satellite operations.

"It will definitely become a reality in the next five years because autonomous satellite operations will be key to ensuring the sustainability in the orbits that the satellites are being operated at this point in time," Sharma said.

GIS technology firm Esri India is integrating AI into GIS applications, which are crucial for building the country's geospatial and AI readiness.

"Our new GIS and AI Competency Centre in Noida, backed by an investment of Rs 150 crore, brings together AI specialists, data scientists, and GIS experts to develop intelligent solutions that empower our customers to extract richer insights from complex geospatial data, automate routine workflows, and make faster, more informed decisions," Agendra Kumar, Managing Director, Esri India, said.

Kumar said AI represents the future, and through collaborative efforts in building capabilities and nurturing talent, India can establish a strong global footprint in AI-driven geospatial innovation.

"Our algorithms automate imagery classification, filter low-quality data like cloud cover and detect subtle changes in terrain or infrastructure over time," Rupesh Kumar, Chief Technology Officer and co-founder of Suhora Technologies, said.

He said the firm is also building predictive models that help users anticipate trends and guide future action, not just understand what has already happened.

"Our mission is to simplify complex space analytics and make satellite intelligence accessible, scalable and actionable for every sector," said Kumar. Lt Gen AK Bhatt said AI was fast becoming the operating layer of India's space economy, helping companies design smarter missions, run spacecraft more autonomously and turn raw space data into real-world decisions at scale. —*PTI*

— SCREENGRAP

US kills 3 more on 'drug' boat in the Caribbean Sea

WASHINGTON, 14 FEB

The US military announced it conducted another strike on a vessel suspected of drug trafficking in the Caribbean Sea. The US Southern Command stated the boat was on known narco-trafficking routes and was involved in drug operations. The strike resulted in three deaths, with a video showing the boat exploding in flames. Since September, US strikes in the Caribbean and eastern Pacific have killed 133 people across at least 38 attacks. Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth claimed that "some top cartel drug-traffickers have decided to cease all narcotics operations indefinitely" due to recent strikes, though he provided no evidence. President Trump has declared the US is in "armed conflict" with Latin American cartels. —*PTI*

US urges nations to oppose UN climate resolution

UNITED NATIONS, 14 FEB

The Trump administration is urging other countries to oppose a UN draft resolution supporting strong climate action, including reparations for damages. The US State Department said the proposal "could pose a major threat to US industry" and "strongly objects" to its adoption. A cable revealed that President Trump views the UN and global climate efforts as exaggerated threats. The draft, sponsored by Vanuatu, stems from a UN Court advisory opinion stating nations could be liable for damages if they fail to act on climate change. While not legally binding, the resolution aims to translate these findings into action. The US plans to lobby other nations to withdraw support, claiming the resolution is "UN overreach". —*PTI*

'Child recruitment by Colombia gangs up fourfold in 5yrs'

BOGOTA, 14 FEB

The forced recruitment of children by illegal armed groups in Colombia has quadrupled over the past five years, UNICEF has warned, blaming escalating violence, poverty and a lack of education and social services. Verified cases rose from 116 in 2020 to 453 in 2024, according to the UN Secretary-General's report on children and armed conflict. The true figure is believed to be far higher due to underreporting, as families fear reprisals. Despite the 2017 peace agreement with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), violence continues as dissident factions and other groups compete for control. Recruiters use coercion, deception and social media to lure vulnerable kids. —*PTI*

Using dollar not against Russian interest: Kremlin

MOSCOW, 14 FEB

The Kremlin has said that conducting trade with the United States in dollars does not contradict Russia's policy of promoting national currencies in foreign transactions. Russia shifted to national currencies after its dollar and euro accounts were frozen by Western countries following the 2022 war with Ukraine, and has since pushed for global de-dollarisation. Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov told state-run TASS news agency that using dollars in transactions with Washington does not conflict with Russia's broader policy. He noted that Russia did not abandon the dollar voluntarily but faced restrictions imposed by the US. Since 2022, Moscow has demanded rouble payments for hydrocarbons and now trades largely in rupees and yuan with India and China. —*PTI*

B'desh's Tarique calls for peace, law and order

Says won't be subservient; bats for B'desh first foreign policy

DHAKA, 14 FEB

Bangladesh Nationalist Party Chairperson Tarique Rahman during a presser, in Dhaka on Saturday —*FB/BNP*

BNP Chairman Tarique Rahman on Saturday said law and order would be a priority in Bangladesh "at any cost," adding that the 13th general election opened a new chapter for building a safe and humane Bangladesh.

The Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) leader, who is set to become the Prime Minister replacing the interim government chief Muhammad Yunus, also spoke about revival of South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and how his government's foreign policy will be guided by "the greater interests of Bangladesh."

He had earlier vowed a "Bangladesh first" nation and reduce the economy's dependence on the garment sector.

The BNP on Friday secured a landslide victory with more than two-thirds majority.

"Our paths and opinions may differ but in the interest of the country, we must remain united. I firmly believe that national unity is our collective strength while division is our weakness," Rahman told a press conference in Dhaka, a day after the victory.

The 60-year-old son of late former prime minister Khaleda Zia said: "From today, we are all free, with the true essence of freedom and rights restored". He added that peace must be maintained. "We will not tolerate any kind of chaos."

The BNP leader said the party will follow a foreign policy that protects the country's interests in its dealings with China, India, and Pakistan.

Bangladesh's foreign policy will be guided by "the greater interests of Bangladesh and its people," Rahman said.

About Bangladesh's future relations with China and the Belt and Road Initiative, he said: "If something is not in Bangladesh's interest, naturally we cannot pursue it."

On SAARC, he said: "It was established through Bangladesh's initiative. We will discuss with our friendly states and try to revive it."

Rahman said he now seeks to navigate the country through a fragile economy left behind by an "authoritarian regime, a weakened constitution and institutions, and a destroyed law and order system."

"We must remain united and uphold the will of the people to ensure that no evil force can re-establish autocracy and ensure that the nation is not turned into a subservient state," he asserted. The Cabinet is set to take oath on 16 or 17 February. —*PTI*

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio adresses the Munich Security Conference on Saturday —*x*

Rubio seeks to renew Europe ties in Munich

MUNICH, 14 FEB

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio attempted to offer a friendly and reassuring assessment of America's relations with Europe under President Donald Trump's administration, saying that the blunt tone of previous criticisms was intended to spur a renaissance in trans-Atlantic ties.

Rubio addressed the Munich Security Conference a year after Vice President JD Vance stunned the same audience with a harsh critique of European values.

Rubio said on Saturday that the US was looking to build a new world order. "While we are prepared, if necessary, to do this alone, it is our preference and it is our hope to do this together with you, our friends here in Europe," he told a gathering of Europe's top leaders.

Rubio describe the US as a child of Europe.

"We have fought against each other, then reconciled, then fought and reconciled again. And we have bled and died side-by-side on battlefields from Kapyong to Kandahar," Rubio said.

He said that Americans were blunt and direct, with "no interest in being polite and orderly caretakers of the west's managed decline".

But, he said that "We do not seek to separate, but to revitalise an old friendship."

Rubio also and attacked Europe's "climate cult" and migration policies, saying that reclaiming borders was not an act of xenophobia. On Friday, German Chancellor Friedrich Merz said even the US isn't strong enough to go alone in world whose order has withered. —*Agencies*

Exiled Iranian crown prince Reza Pahlavi meets Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy on the sidelines of the Munich Security Summit on Saturday. Adresing press, Pahlavi called for global protests against the Iranian government. He warned that more deaths were likely in Iran if the international community didn't tak action *X@ZELENSKYYUA*

Russian strikes kill 1 in Ukraine ahead of talks

KYIV, 14 FEB

A Russian drone strike on the Ukrainian city of Odesa killed an elderly woman in a residential building, Ukraine's State Emergency Service said on Saturday. Meanwhile, in Russia, a civilian was killed in a Ukrainian drone strike on a car in the border region of Bryansk, regional Gov Alexander Bogomaz said.

On Friday, a Ukrainian missile strike killed two people and wounded five in the Russian border city of Belgorod.

The strikes come as trilateral peace talks between Russia, Ukraine and the US are due in Geneva next week, days ahead of the four year anniversary of Moscow's all- out invasion.

The discussions will be held on Tuesday and Wednesday, Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov said in a statement.

The talks take place against a backdrop of continued fighting along the roughly 1,250-km front line, relentless Russian bombardment of civilian areas of Ukraine and the country's power grid, and Kyiv's almost daily long-range drone attacks on war assets on Russian soil.

The previous US-led efforts, such as the talks in Abu Dhabi, did not find breakthroughs on issues such the future of Ukraine's Donbas industrial heartland that is largely occupied by Russian forces.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said last week that the US has given a June deadline. But US President Donald Trump's previous deadlines have passed without consequence. —*PTI*

The strikes come ahead of the invasion's four-year anniversary and trilateral talks in Geneva later next week —*UKRAINE EMERGENCY SERVICE*

'Iran regime change would be the best'

WASHINGTON, 14 FEB

US President Donald Trump said that a change in power in Iran "would be the best thing that could happen" as he weighs whether to take military action against Tehran.

Trump made the comments shortly after visiting with troops in Fort Bragg, North Carolina, and after he confirmed earlier in the day that he's deploying a second aircraft carrier group to the Middle East.

"It seems like that would be the best thing that could happen," Trump told reporters when asked if he wanted regime change. "For 47 years, they've been talking and talking and talking."

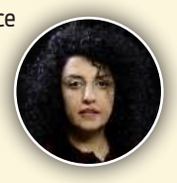
"In case we don't make a deal, we'll need it," Trump said of the second carrier. Trump said the USS Gerald R Ford, the world's largest aircraft carrier, will be leaving from the Caribbean, near Venezuela, to Iran "very soon". The US has already stationed a carrier - USS Abraham Lincoln - flanked by destroyers in the region.

Gulf nations have warned that any attack could spiral into another regional conflict, in a region reeling from Israel's ruthless attacks on Gaza, Lebanon, Syria, Iran and Yemen.

Trump's comments come as US and Iran were due to hold a second round of talks. However, it appears as if they fell through, with Iranian officials conveying their response to US intermediaries in Oman. —*PTI*

US President Donald Trump at Fort Bragg on Friday *PTI*

Jailed Nobel laureate critical



Iran's imprisoned Nobel Peace Prize laureate Narges Mohammadi is worsening, her husband said. Taghi Rahmani said this was due to a beating she endured when she was arrested two months ago, where multiple men hit and kicked her in her side, head and neck. She was arrested a few weeks before the nationwide protests began and launcheda hunger strike in February.

Homeland dept shuts down

The Department of Homeland Security has shut down after lawmakers failed to meet a Friday deadline to agree upon a funding bill. Democrats are demanding changes to the way Immigration and Customs (ICE) officials operate, and despite trading offers with Republicans, there has been no meaningful breakthrough. ICE agents are unlikely to be hit by the at least 10-day shutdown.

US used Anthropic's AI in raid to capture Maduro: Report

WASHINGTON, 14 FEB

The US used Anthropic's artificial-intelligence (AI) model Claude to capture Venezuelan leader Nicolas Maduro, the Wall Street Journal reported, citing sources.

Anthropic is partnered with Palantir Technologies, a tech company that has massive ties with the US Department of Defence, as well as Israel and other countries.

It is unclear as to how the AI model was used, as neither Anthropic nor the Department of Defence commented on the matter. However, President Donald Trump had earlier bragged that the US used a "discombobulator" which rendered Venezuela's defence ineffective during the January raid.

The Journal noted that other AI models from different companies may have been used in the operation.

Notably, Anthropic was awarded the $200 million Pentagon contract last year.

Meanwhile, Trump celebrated the special forces members of the operation at Fort Bragg, one of the world's largest military bases. He said the "the entire world saw what the full military might" of the US can do. —*Agencies*

Kremlin poisoned Russian oppn leader Navalny with frogs: Europe

NAIROBI, 14 FEB

Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny was poisoned with a lethal toxin from the skin of dart frogs, five European countries said in a joint statement on Saturday, blaming the Kremlin.

The Foreign Ministries of the UK, France, Germany, Sweden and the Netherlands said analysis of samples from Navalny, who died two years ago, "have conclusively confirmed the presence of epibatidine." It is a toxin found in poison dart frogs in South America that is not found naturally in Russia, they noted.

The countries said that "Russia had the means, motive and opportunity." They said they were reporting Russia to the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons for a breach of the Chemical Weapons Convention. Russia has long maintained that President Putin's fierce opponent died of natural causes. —*PTI*

AMERICA ON EDGE

VANISHED INTO THIN AIR: THE CASE OF NANCY GUTHRIE

WASHINGTON, 14 FEB

"Dear Guthrie Family your neighbors stand with you." Two weeks after Nancy Guthrie, the mother of 'Today' show news anchor Savannah Guthrie disappeared, a placard stands outside her house. 84-year-old Nancy was believed to be abducted in the middle of the night, but police have been unable to produce any major breakthrough. The case has put America on edge.

A person has just vanished from the face of the earth, leaving behind a family begging for help and a President claiming that clue have been found when authorities say otherwise.

Nancy allegedly disappeared on the intervening night between 31 January and 1 February in Pima country, Arizona. She had dinner at her daughter, Annie's place and was dropped back home by family members. Tommaso Cioni, Nancy's son-in-law was the last person who saw her before she went missing.

At around 1am, Nancy's doorbell camera was disconnected and about an hour later, her pacemaker disconnected from her phone. Security footage show a man near her house before the security lines were cut.

The next morning, Nancy's family called 911 after a churchgoer said that she didn't attend the morning prayer. Police say that Nancy did not leave the house on her own, but provided no alternate explanation. They have found traces of Nancy's blood in the house, but are unable to ascertain how the kidnapper – if there even was one – entered the home.

There have since been three ransom notes issued – but authorities have been unable to identify the authenticity. One note demands payment in Bitcoin, according to local media. Authorities say that they are keeping all lines open, as the family says they are willing to pay up to $6 million in ransom.

The family has been putting out social media posts on a regular basis, pleading for help and a sign that Nancy is alive. US President Donald Trump said that he believes Nancy will be found soon, while the FBI has offered a reward of $1,00,0000 for information leading to the arrest of the alleged kidnapper.

On Friday Pima County Sheriff's department begun a fresh search for whereabouts of Nancy, at a house a little over three kms away from her house in this north American town. The search came after they detected DNA evidence of a suspect near the Nancy's house.

Journalist and television host Savannah Guthrie, along with her siblings Annie and Camron, in a video message appealing for information about their mother, Nancy (inset), who was reportedly kidnapped two weeks ago —*x*

A suspect was also detained on Friday, but was released later.

On Thursday, the FBI released a physical description of the suspect, a male between 5ft 9in and 5ft 10in (175-177cm) with an average build. The identity details of the suspect were established with the help of footage from a doorbell camera outside Guthrie's home.

The suspect was wearing a 25-litre Ozark Trail Hiker Pack backpack in the footage, the FBI said adding it received 13,000 tips, including 4,000 in the 24 hours after releasing the video of the suspect.

Police say they have are pursuing a lead - but given Nancy's age and her medical needs, time appears against them. —*Salar News*

— PTI

Akasa Air is not opportunistic, says CEO Vinay Dube

NEW DELHI, 14 FEB
Akasa Air CEO Vinay Dube said on Saturday the airline prioritises fiscal discipline and operational planning rather than opportunistic expansion. Speaking at the ET Now Global Business Summit 2026, he emphasised disciplined fleet management, avoiding dry or wet leasing aircraft in peak months or parking planes during downtimes. The airline currently operates 33 aircraft, with another joining soon, having begun operations in August 2022. Dube highlighted that building redundancies of capital and personnel is central. He noted the airline's swift adaptation to revised Flight Duty Time Limitations (FDTL) norms, implemented in November 2025, allowed Akasa Air to operate a cancellation-free network this winter, unlike competitors such as IndiGo.—*PTI*

USFDA issues Form 483 to Piramal's Telangana unit

NEW DELHI, 14 FEB
Piramal Pharma has said the The US Food and Drug Administration (USFDA) has issued Form 483 with four observations after inspecting its Telangana-based manufacturing plant. USFDA conducted an inspection of the company's Digwal (Telangana) based plant from 9 to 13 February. These observations are related to enhancement in procedures and not related to data integrity and indicated to be classified as voluntary action indicated. The company is preparing a detailed response to the observations, which will be submitted to the USFDA within the stipulated timelines. Piramal Pharma said that it was committed to maintaining the highest standards of compliance and will work closely with the agency to address all observations. —*PTI*

TRAI crackdowns on spam with 7 lakh notices

NEW DELHI, 14 FEB
The Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) has released its annual update on the enforcement of Unsolicited Commercial Communication (UCC) and consumer engagement under the Do Not Disturb (DND) ecosystem for the year 2025, highlighting a significant scale-up in regulatory action against spam telemarketing, a statement from the Ministry of Communications said. During 2025, 7,31,120 notices were issued to unregistered telemarketers. 4,73,075 entities were subjected to one-month communication restrictions, while 89,936 repeat offenders faced six-month communication caps. 1,84,482 telecom resources were also disconnected.—*PTI*

NewSpace India to resell GalaxEye space products

NEW DELHI, 14 FEB
NewSpace India Limited (NSIL), the commercial arm of the Department of Space, will resell products from Bengaluru-based private space technology company GalaxEye, officials announced on Saturday. The deal covers advanced satellite imagery solutions, including SyncFused OptoSAR data products, which provide insights for sectors such as agriculture, disaster management, and natural resource monitoring. The agreement makes GalaxEye the first private Indian satellite operator to formally partner with NSIL under a data reseller model. The deal marks a milestone in India's space policy, showcasing collaboration between government and private enterprises to foster innovation, boost global competitiveness and growth. The company will launch an Earth observation satellite soon.—*PTI*

Centre gives Rs 1L cr to overhaul cities

To attract Rs 4L cr investment in cities

NEW DELHI, 14 FEB

The Union Cabinet has approved the launch of the Urban Challenge Fund (UCF) with a total central assistance of Rs 1 lakh crore, **Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw** said on Saturday.

Under the scheme, central assistance will cover 25 per cent of a project's cost, provided that at least 50 per cent of the funding is mobilised from the market. It will lead to a total investment of Rs 4 lakh crore in the urban sector over the next five years.

The move marks a paradigm shift in India's urban new development approach from grant-based financing to a market-linked, reform-driven and outcome-oriented infrastructure creation.

The UCF will leverage market financing, private sector participation and citizen-centric reforms to deliver high-quality urban infrastructure, it said.

The fund aims to build resilient, productive, inclusive and climate-responsive cities, positioning them as key drivers of the country's next phase of economic growth.

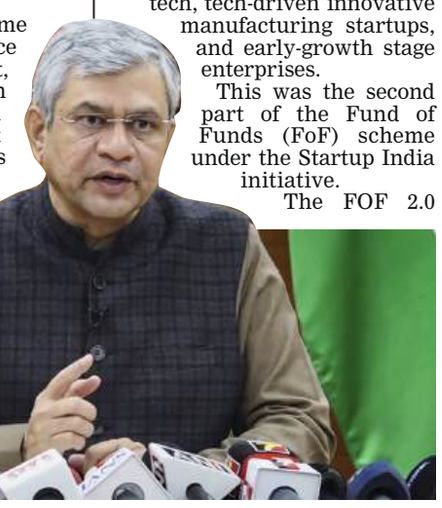
The UCF will be operational from FY 2025-26 to FY 2030-31, with an extendable implementation period up to FY 2033-34

It will help to implement proposals relating to cities as growth hubs, creative redevelopment of cities, and water and sanitation.

The fund will cover cities with a population of 10 lakh or more (2025 estimates); all state and Union Territory capitals not included in that category, and major industrial cities with a population of 1 lakh or more, the statement said.

Additionally, all ULBs in hilly and northeastern states, as well as smaller ULBs with a population below 1 lakh, will be eligible for support under the Credit Repayment Guarantee Scheme. In principle, all cities will be covered under the UCF, it said.

To facilitate first-time access to market finance for cities in the Northeast, and for smaller ULBs in other states/UTs, a Credit Repayment Guarantee Scheme of Rs 5,000 crore has been approved. —*PTI*



Indian start-ups to get Rs 10K cr fund

Fund to mobilise capital, boost deep tech

NEW DELHI, 14 FEB

The government has approved Rs 10,000 crore Fund of Funds to mobile venture capital and support deep tech, tech-driven innovative manufacturing startups, and early-growth stage enterprises.

This was the second part of the Fund of Funds (FoF) scheme under the Startup India initiative.

The FOF 2.0 has been designed to continue the momentum of investments in startups, with an expanded scope over FFS 1.0.

In 2016, the government constituted a Fund of Funds worth Rs 10,000 crore to provide seed capital and enable startups to take calculated risks.

There are about 100 unicorns at present. A unicorn refers to a startup valued at USD 1 billion or more.

Since its launch, the number of government-recognised startups has risen from about 500 units recognised as startups to over two lakh at present.

Under the part of the fund, the entire corpus of Rs 10,000 crore has been committed to 145 Alternative Investment Funds, which have invested over Rs 25,500 crore in more than 1,370 startups across the country in various sectors.

This fund played a key role in nurturing first-time founders, crowding in private capital, and helping build a strong foundation for India's venture capital ecosystem.

The new fund will prioritise breakthroughs in high-tech areas that require long-term capital.

The focus will also be on empowering early-growth stage founders to provide a safety net for new and innovative ideas, reducing early-stage failures caused by a lack of funding.

Further, it will encourage investments beyond major metros so that innovation thrives in every corner of the country.

The statement said it has been designed to address high-risk capital gaps and strengthen India's domestic venture capital base, particularly smaller funds, to further boost the domestic investment landscape. —*PTI*

US trade pact to cover India's energy, crude needs: Goyal

MUMBAI, 14 FEB

Union Minister Piyush Goyal on Saturday said the interim trade agreement reached between the Centre and the US will include India's energy requirements and would help it secure crude oil at more competitive prices.

Speaking to reporters here, the Commerce and Industry Minister said that India and the US have agreed to work towards increasing the annual trade between the two countries to USD 500 billion by 2030, and the government is working to achieve this target.

He said the proposed USD 500 billion trade would include India's energy requirements, such as crude oil, LNG and LPG.

"India is the fastest-growing large economy in the world, and its energy demand is rising by around 7 per cent annually. Increasing imports and having more suppliers would help India secure crude oil at more competitive prices," Goyal said.

Last week, India and the US announced that they had reached a framework for an interim trade agreement under which both sides will reduce import duties on a number of goods to boost two-way trade.

While the US will reduce tariffs on Indian goods to 18 per cent from 50 per cent, India will eliminate or cut down import duties on all US industrial goods and a wide range of American food and agricultural products.

India produces 140 million tonnes of steel every year.

—*PTI*

FOR EFFICIENT OPERATIONS

IndiGo to hire over 1,000 pilots after Dec cancellations

GURUGRAM, 14 FEB

IndiGo is gearing up for a massive cockpit recruitment push, with plans to onboard over 1,000 pilots, according to The Economic Times.

The airline is stepping up manpower to avoid a repeat of disruptions seen after new rest norms came into force, sources said.

In December, IndiGo cancelled over 5,000 flights in seven days due to crew shortages linked to the updated rules.

According to the sources, IndiGo's hiring plan spans across multiple ranks such as trainee first officers, senior first officers and captains.

Additionally, the notice also stated that it is willing to hire pilots without prior experience in IndiGo's backbone fleet, Airbus A320.

The revised rules state how many pilots can perform night-time landings between 12am and 6am. It also increased the required rest period.

A probe by the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) showed that IndiGo was understaffed for the rule change and had failed to focus on pilot training time.

The DGCA said that the crew were repeatedly shuffled, overexerted with longer duty days and dreading trips by travelling as passengers to operate the carrier from a different location.

The carrier is strengthening its pilot pipeline to match the pace of its fleet expansion, a senior official said.

IndiGo's parent firm, InterGlobe Aviation, was issued a tax demand over GST related issues—*Agencies*

In December, 2025 IndiGo cancelled over 5,000 flights across the country in seven days due to shortage of crew linked to updated rules —*PTI*

Ixigo acquires Trenes' stake for Rs 125 crore

NEW DELHI, 14 FEB

Travel aggregator Ixigo has made its first major international move by approving agreements to acquire a 60 per cent stake in Spain's second-largest train booking platform, Online Travel Solutions (Trenes), for Rs 11.70 million (over Rs 125 crore).

The acquisition marks Ixigo's strategic entry into Europe, a market considered the global benchmark for rail travel. The company said the deal would create synergies by combining Trenes' strong customer base, brand presence, and local operator integrations with ixigo's AI-led product innovation. The investment is expected to accelerate Trenes' product development, enhance AI capabilities, and improve the customer experience. SL will become a step-down subsidiary of ixigo. —*PTI*

Jio, Anthropic, 13 others launch Tech Alliance

NEW DELHI, 14 FEB

A set of like-minded global firms in the area of connectivity to cloud infrastructure to semiconductors, including Jio Platforms and Anthropic, have joined hands to form a Trusted Tech Alliance, a joint statement said.

The alliance was launched at the Munich Security Conference with 15 companies from Africa, Asia, Europe, and North America coming together to work across borders, and based on a shared set of principles for a trusted technology stack - from connectivity, cloud infrastructure, and semiconductors to software and AI.

These principles are designed to ensure that, regardless of a supplier's nationality, companies in this Alliance will adhere to common commitments of transparency, security and data protection, which build trust and pass on the benefits of technology to people across the globe. The Alliance brings together leading companies committed to a shared set of clear, verifiable practices and principles that manifest how technology can be secure, reliable and responsibly operated, regardless of where it is built or deployed.

Participating companies have agreed to five specific principles that define what it means to develop, deploy, operate and cooperate as a trusted global technology provider. These principles include 'transparent corporate governance and ethical conduct, operational transparency, secure development and assessment. —*PTI*

Representatives of 15 global firms during the launch of Trusted Tech Alliance in Munich —*X@JUSTINHOTARD*

Microsoft AI CEO confirms plan to 'dump' OpenAI

NEW DELHI, 14 FEB

Microsoft AI chief Mustafa Suleyman said that the company is pushing toward "true AI self-sufficiency"—a clear signal that the tech giant is actively reducing its dependence on OpenAI.

"My personal mission at Microsoft is to build superintelligence," Suleyman told The Financial Express, adding that the company must develop its own frontier foundation models with "gigawatt scale compute" and "some of the very best AI training team in the world."

In August 2025, Microsoft AI previewed MAI-1-preview, an in-house mixture-of-experts model pretrained on roughly 15,000 Nvidia H100 GPUs. The company has signalled plans to roll it into certain Copilot text use cases—a direct step toward replacing OpenAI models in its own products.

Microsoft has also been quietly widening its AI supplier base andnhosts models from xAI, Meta, Mistral, and Black Forest Labs in its data centres.

Microsoft and OpenAI signed a partnership agreement in October 2025, which converted Microsoft's profit-sharing rights into a 27% ownership stake in the OpenAI Group PBC, valued at roughly $135 billion. —*Agencies*

AI not a threat to India IT services: JP Morgan

NEW DELHI, 14 FEB

Artificial intelligence (AI) is unlikely to eliminate the need for IT services. Instead, it will become "another tool to address more work with the same budget," a report by JP Morgan's Asia Pacific Equity Research team stated.

In its note titled 'India IT Services: Looking through the AI fog 2 -- Discounted for extinction? Div/FCF yields at crisis levels,' JP Morgan argued that AI will create net new areas of work rather than shrink the opportunity set for IT vendors.

AI will address more work with the same budget like offshore labor, enterprise software, cloud have been in the past.

The report highlighted emerging demand in modernising legacy code, rewriting customized SaaS applications, building AI agents for operations, ensuring AI trust and reliability, and integrating physical AI systems.

Enterprise technology teams will rely on AI to expand output within constrained budgets - not replace service providers altogether. Market weakness reflects fears that rapid advances in AI could compress revenue and reduce the addressable market for Indian IT firms. AI-driven software deployments will require significant services expertise to function in complex environments. —*ANI*

— AI

COUNTRY'S BIGGEST MARKET

Nothing opens its 1st Indian store in B'luru

BENGALURU, 14 FEB

Nothing has launched its first flagship store in Bengaluru in India, with dedicated space for visitors to hang out and interact. The store is bigger than its London flagship store.

The Nothing flagship store comprises two floors with a total area of 5,032 square feet. While the ground floor shows the complete device range of the phonemaker, the second floor includes a place for visitors to hang out and interact, as well as shoot content in a professional studio.

Nothing CEO Carl Pei revealed that the company chose Bengaluru for its flagship store as it was the company's biggest market in India.

In the store, visitors will be able to see Nothing's product range and try out different products, including audio devices. The London-based phonemaker said that its phone users can get their name or any other text engraved on their device.

When you buy a Nothing product, you can also get a T-shirt imprinted with your name. There is also a dedicated space for buyers to record the unboxing of their new phones, along with a professional studio.

Nothing will open flagship stores in Tokyo, Japan and New York, USA.

The company is willing to work with local artists to showcase their artwork in the store, or to have events for the community. The company also aims to tie up with local brands.

The store also shows elements of the company's history, and some demonstrations such as water and scratch tests.

The company announced a $100 million investment in India in September last year as part of a joint venture in manufacturing. —*Agencies*

Nothing CEO Carl Pei said that the company chose to open its first flagship store in Bengaluru as it was its biggest market in India —*X*

Battle of Nerves: Can India solve the Pak spin?

High risk of rain in marquee India vs Pak game in Colombo

COLOMBO, 14 FEB

After all the twists and turns off the field, India and Pakistan will eventually face off at the R. Premadasa Stadium (RPS) in Colombo – a contest that will likely be dictated by spinners on the field.

Amid the still-smouldering embers of an impasse that mixed cricket with politics like never before, India will need middle-order stability and a fully fit Abhishek Sharma to maintain domination over Pakistan when the two bitter rivals clash in the T20 World Cup's marquee fixture, here on Sunday.

A temporary 'peace season' has dawned after Pakistan made a U-turn from its boycott stand and agreed to take the field against India at the Premadasa stadium here. Practically, the whole of South Asia was turning the wheel to make this match happen, should the weather gods allow, because of its power to attract millions -- fans and bank balance alike.

So, a train of events set off by the BCCI-instructed release of Bangladesh pacer Mustafizur Rahman from the roster of Kolkata Knight Riders, which so transformed into a cross-border crisis, has come to a halt, for now. If Abhishek not available, then India has the option of either sticking with Sanju Samson or bringing in a fit-

Abhishek Sharma and Tariq -PTI

again Washington Sundar to open with an on-song Ishan Kishan.

Tariq is our trump card: Salman Ali

Skipper Salman Ali Agha on Saturday defended the unorthodox action of Usman Tariq and termed the 'pause and sling' off-spinner as the "trump card" of Pakistan against India on a tacky Premadasa pitch in the T20 World Cup match here on Sunday. Tariq showed his prowess with a three-wicket haul against the United States of America, albeit at the neighbouring Sinhalese Sports Club, and the 27-year-old could be doubly dangerous on a slower RPICS track.

Pakistan skipper Salman kept the suspense about shaking hands with Indian players at the toss or after the T20 World Cup match here on Sunday, but said the game should be played in the spirit that it is meant to be. —*PTI*

Rashid, Banton guide England to 5-wicket win over Scotland

KOLKATA, 14 FEB

Veteran leg-spinner Adil Rashid returned with figures of 3/36 before Tom Banton smashed an unbeaten fifty in the middle overs to guide England to a comfortable five-wicket win over Scotland in a T20 World Cup Group C match here on Saturday.

Opting to bowl first, England rode on Rashid's exploits to bowl out Scotland for 152.

Pacer Jofra Archer and left-arm spinner Liam Dawson also chipped in with two wickets apiece.

Captain Richie Berrington top-scored for Scotland with a 32-ball 49 while opener Michael Jones contributed 33.

Chasing, England didn't have the best of starts, losing both their openers Phil Salt and Jos Buttler inside two overs.

Brief Scores. Scotland: 152 all out in 19.4 overs (Richie Berrington 49; Adil Rashid 3/36). England: 155 for 5 in 18.2 overs (Tom Banton 63 not out; Oliver Davidson 1/12) —*PTI*

Overall Record of India-Pakistan T20I Matches

Matches Played: 8

India Wins: 7

Pakistan: 1

Match starts @ 7 pm

Tucker's 94 powers Ireland to massive 96-run win over Oman

COLOMBO, 14 FEB

Skipper Lorcan Tucker's blistering 51-ball 94 was complemented by a disciplined bowling effort as Ireland powered to a massive 96-run win over Oman in a lop-sided Group B T20 World Cup match here on Saturday.

Sent in to bat, Tucker launched a ferocious counter-attack, smashing 10 fours and four sixes in a sensational knock as Ireland recovered from 47 for 3 to 235 for five, the highest total of this edition of the T20 World Cup. Chasing the massive total, Aamir Kaleem (50) and Hammad Mirza (46) gave Oman hope, but once they departed, it all went downhill as they were bowled out for 139 in 18 overs.

As many as eight batters scored in single digits. Josh Little was the most successful bowler as he snared three for 16 in his quota of four overs. He was ably supported by Matthew Humphreys (2/27), Barry McCarthy (2/32), and George ock rell (1/6).

Ireland 235 for 5 (Tucker 94*, Delany 56, Shakeel 3-33) beat Oman 139 (Kaleem 50, Mirza 46, Little 3-16) by 96 runs. —*PTI*

ICC T20 WC MATCHES TOMMORROW

West Indies look to top group in T20 World Cup contest against Nepal

A confident West Indies will aim to maintain their winning run and cement their position at the top of Group C when they face a struggling Nepal in a T20 World Cup clash at the Wankhede Stadium on ***Sunday 11 am***.The Caribbean side has won both its matches so far and currently leads the group with the best Net Run Rate (1.625). Another victory would further strengthen its hold on the summit as it eyes qualification with momentum firmly on its side. With a fixture against Italy in Kolkata to follow, the West Indies know that successive wins in these two games will ensure they finish as Group C toppers. However, they cannot afford to lower their guard.Despite Nepal's underwhelming cam paign so far, the Associate nation has shown glimpses of resilience in patches and could look to spring a surprise. West Indies will therefore need to balance confidence with caution, ensuring they avoid complacency and stay focused on the task at hand.

T20 World Cup: United States eye momentum against Namibia

Revitalised by a commanding win over the Netherlands, the United States will look to keep their slim Super Eight hopes alive when they face Namibia in a must-win Group A clash here on ***Sunday 3 pm***.With two wins from as many matches, India and Pakistan occupy the top two spots in the group, but a victory for the USA would keep them in contention should either of the frontrunners falter in the remaining fixtures.After losing their first two matches, the USA roared back with a 93-run victory over the Dutch, recording the biggest winning margin by runs for an Associate team in T20 World Cup history. It was also their first win over the Netherlands after six previous defeats across formats.A clinical batting effort followed by a disciplined spin performance laid the foundation for the turnaround.Saiteja Mukkamalla, recalled to the XI, made full use of the opportunity with a fluent knock laced with authoritative offside strokes.

-PTI

Bhagat clinches SL3 gold, wins record 6th world title

MANAMA, 14 FEB

India's Pramod Bhagat captured the men's SL3 gold medal with a commanding straight-game win over Muhammad Al Imran of Indonesia at the BWF Para World Championships here on Saturday. The 37-year-old Bhagat outclassed his opponent 21-12, 21-18 in the final to claim his fourth consecutive singles gold at the world championships and his sixth overall world title in the category. The victory underlines Bhagat's sustained dominance in the SL3 division, which refers to a classification for standing players with significant lower limb impairment. Bhagat, who developed polio when he was five, had secured world championship singles gold medals in 2009, 2015, 2019, 2022.—*PTI*

WTT Chennai: Desai-Ghorpade reach mixed doubles final

CHENNAI, 14 FEB

Fourth seeds Harmeet Desai and Yashaswini Ghorpade sealed a spot in the mixed doubles final with ease, while G Sathiyan registered a hard-fought win to reach the men's singles quarterfinals in the WTT Star Contender Chennai 2026 here on Saturday.

Desai and Ghorpade were in total command in the all-Indian mixed doubles semifinal, beating wildcard holders Payas Jain and Syndrela Das 3-0 (11-9, 11-6, 11-9). They will now face second seeds Eduard Ionescu and Bernadette Szocs of Romania, who advanced after third seeds Oh Junsung of Korea and Miku Nagasaki of Japan conceded the match while trailing 1-2.Earlier, Sathiyan kept Indian hopes alive in the men's singles as he

fought back from a 1-2 deficit to beat Ionescu 3-2 (9-11 11-3 10-12 11-7 11-5) to advance to the quarterfinals.

He will now face Czechia's Lubomir Jancarik, who got the better of India's Manush Shah 3-1 (11-4, 13-11, 5-11, 13-11).Meanwhile, Sehit Suravajjula's giant-killin' run came to an end when he went down 1-3 (6-11, 12-10, 13-15, 7-11) against top-seed Oh Junsung.

The Korean, however, has given a walkover to Frenchman Thibault Poret in the quarterfinals after he injured himself during the mixed doubles semifinals. India's challenge in women's singles also came to an end after qualifier Nithya Mani lost 1-3 (11-9, 5-11, 6-11, 8-11) against Chinese Taipei's fourth seed Cheng I-Ching in the pre-quarterfinals. —*PTI*

FREESTYLE CHESS WORLD C'SHIP

Arjun Erigaisi beats Magnus Carlsen

WANGELS, 14 FEB

Arjun Erigaisi beat Magnus Carlsen yet failed to reach the semifinals of the FIDE Freestyle Chess World Championship in Wangels, Germany.

Erigaisi beat Carlsen in the classification round, then beat Vincent Keymer and FIDE World Cup winner Javokhir Sindarov. For Carlsen, currently the World No. 1 in classical chess, it was his only loss in that round as he finished with a score of 4.5 out of 7.

However, Erigaisi failed to maintain his momentum, losing the remaining four games in that round to finish sixth and get eliminated from the title race.

Carlsen recently lost to Erigiasi at the FIDE World Blitz Championship 2025, infamously slamming the table in frustration, and another consecutive loss—at Weissenhaus — would definitely sting for the Norwegian. After the classification round, Carlsen, Keymer, Caruana, and Abdusattorov progressed to the semifinals. —*PTI*

Sabalenka, Swiatek withdraw from WTA 1000 event in Dubai

SYDNEY, 14 FEB

Aryna Sabalenka and Iga Swiatek, the world's top two players, have both pulled out of next week's WTA 1000 event in Dubai, tournament organisers announced.

Sabalenka has not played since losing the Australian Open final to Elena Rybakina last month.

"I'm really sorry I have to withdraw from Dubai," said the Belarusian in a statement released by the organisers on Friday.

"I have such a special connection with the tournament, the fans, and the city. Unfortunately, I am not feeling 100 per cent. But I hope to be back next year and wish the tournament a great event."

Swiatek was in action this week in Doha but failed in her bid for a fourth Qatar Open title, losing to Maria Sakkari in the quarterfinals.

"I am sorry to announce that I will not be playing Dubai this year due to a change of schedule," said the six-time Grand Slam champion.

The first round in Dubai gets underway on Sunday. . —*PTI*

Full-strength K'taka takes on Uttarakhand in semifinal

UTTARAKHAND, 14 FEB

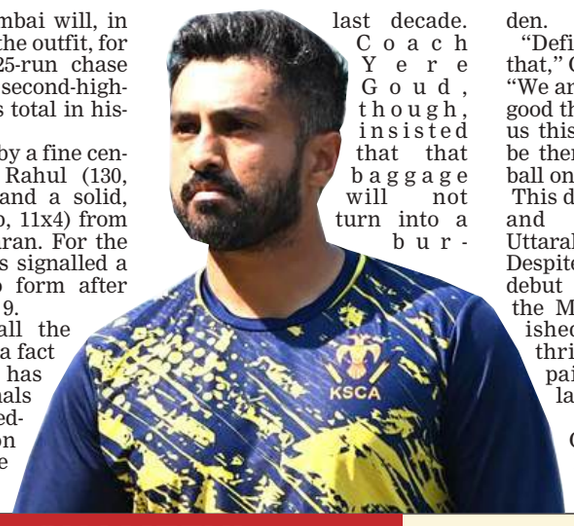
A first Ranji Trophy final since its title-winning exploits in 2014-15 beckons Karnataka as it takes on Uttarakhand in the semifinals of the 2025-26 edition at the Ekana Cricket Stadium from Sunday.

Coming as it does on the back of two splendid victories over Punjab (five wickets) and Mumbai (four wickets), Karnataka should fancy its chances. The Devdutt Padikkal-led squad has also attained full strength, with speedster V. Vyshak having recovered from his hamstring injury.

The quarterfinal win over heavyweight Mumbai will, in particular, boost the outfit, for the successful 325-run chase was Karnataka's second-highest fourth-innings total in history.

It was fashioned by a fine century from K.L. Rahul (130, 182b, 14x4, 1x6) and a solid, unbeaten 83 (123b, 11x4) from southpaw R. Smaran. For the latter, the innings signalled a timely return to form after scores of 0, 1, and 9.

However, for all the good omens, it is a fact that Karnataka has lost in the semifinals of the premier red-ball competition four times in the last decade.



Coach Yere Goud, though, insisted that that baggage will not turn into a burden.

"Definitely not looking at that," Goud said on match eve. "We are focusing on doing the good things that have brought us this far. It is important to be there or thereabouts from ball one."

This desire to remain focused and sharp is because Uttarakhand is no pushover. Despite making its First Class debut as recently as 2018-19, the Mountain State has finished a quarterfinalist thrice. The 2025-26 campaign marks its maiden last-four appearance.

Skipper Kunal Chandela's 709 runs and left-arm spinner Mayank Mishra's table-topping 52 wickets have been instrumental in the ascent, with the latter securing a match-haul of eight for 72 in the last-eight triumph over Jharkhand.

It remains to be seen how much purchase Mayank and former Karnataka spinner J. Suchith (25 wickets and 414 runs) get from the Lucknow pitch, which Goud expects to be a "good batting surface". If they can help avenge Uttarakhand's innings-and-281-run quarterfinal defeat to Karnataka in 2022-23 – the only previous meeting between the sides – it will be a story for the ages. —*PTI*

EFI tells ITPF that Singh was most appropriate choice

AHMEDABAD, 14 FEB

The Equestrian Federation of India (EFI) has strongly defended its decision to appoint Col Tarsem Singh as coach of the Indian tent pegging team, conveying to the International Tent Pegging Federation (ITPF) that he was the "most appropriate choice" for the World Cup Qualifiers despite serious allegations against him. ITPF, the sport's world governing body, wrote to EFI on January 26, 2026, flagging "serious concerns" about athlete safety following a complaint regarding Singh's alleged involvement in a sexual harassment case. The Sports Authority of India (SAI) had also, on January 30, sought comments on the matter from the EFI. Led by Acting President Col. Jagat Singh, EFI responded on February 6 with a firm defence.—*PTI*

SHAMEFUL

Pakistan players' spending hours on the road

KARACHI, 14 FEB

Hockey legends Hassan Sardar and Samiullah on Saturday termed the incident of Pakistan team players spending several hours on the road in Australia after the national federation failed to pay the hotel bills as "shameful" and demanded an inquiry into the whole episode.

The players of the Pakistan team were forced to spend several hours on the road upon reaching Canberra for the FIH Pro League, as their hotel bookings in the Australian capital were cancelled after the Pakistan Hockey Federation (PHF)

failed to pay the bill due to a lack of funds.

Olympian and former captain Samiullah expressed his anger at the way the national team players were treated."The Prime Minister has a lot of time for cricket, but he is also the patron-in-chief of the PHF, and I would request him to also clean up hockey affairs.

This is shameful," he said. Another Olympian and former captain, Hasan Sardar, wondered how the national team would perform on the field when such things happened."Imagine how demoralised the players and support staff must be going into a tough tournament against top teams," he said."The government must hold an inquiry into the whole episode and find out who is responsible for the humiliation faced by the team."Meanwhile, more disturbing details have emerged about the ordeal the Pakistan players faced in Australia due to the apparent poor governance by the PHF and PSB. —*PTI*

Pedro hat-trick sends Chelsea into FA Cup fifth round

LONDON, 14 FEB

Chelsea's Pedro Neto Fires hat-trick As Liam Rosenior Routs Former Club Hull City In FA Cup

Chelsea eased into the FA Cup fifth round as Pedro Neto's hat-trick inspired a 4-0 win at Hull on Liam Rosenior's return to the club that sacked him two years ago. Rosenior's side took the lead through Neto's superb first-half strike before the Portugal forward netted again after the break. Estevao Willian scored Chelsea's third, and Neto completed his treble to wrap up the fourth-round rout at the MKM Stadium. It was an emotional evening for Blues boss Rosenior as he faced the club that ruthlessly severed their long relationship with him in 2024. Rosenior supported Hull as a child alongside his season-ticket-holding grandmother, played for the club across five years, and managed them for two seasons.

He was sacked after narrowly failing to reach the Championship play-offs amid criticism of his team's conservative tactics. —*PTI*